

Joint advice to Local Planning Authorities: Optional Higher Water efficiency standard for new housing (January 2019 updated February 2020)

Anglian Water, Environment Agency and Natural England

All new homes have to meet the mandatory national standard set out in the Building Regulations (of 125 litres/person/day). Where there is a clear local need, local planning authorities can set out [Local Plan](#) policies requiring new dwellings to meet the tighter Building Regulations optional requirement of 110 litres/person/day.

The National Planning Policy Framework policies expects local planning authorities to adopt proactive strategies to adapt to climate change that take full account of water supply and demand considerations. The local planning authority can consider whether a tighter water efficiency requirement for new homes is justified to help manage demand.

This joint statement has been produced to set out the common position of Anglian Water, the Environment Agency and Natural England on the inclusion of this optional standard in Local Plans within the Anglian Water company area.

Context

The Anglian Water region is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change: temperature rise, the potential reduction in summer rainfall, lower available water resources, increased flood risk and rising sea levels. Eastern England is the driest region in the UK, receiving only around 600 millimetres rainfall per annum, around two-thirds of the average for England and Wales¹. The ecological sensitivity of many of the wetland sites in the east of England adds a further challenge where there are environmental drivers for abstraction reductions.

Together with this sensitivity the growth in population, housing and the economy will put increasing demand on water and wastewater services. Securing sustainable supplies will demand substantial improvements in the efficiency of water usage by Anglian Water and by Anglian Water's customers.

Establishing a clear need

To include the optional higher target, national guidance states that it will be for a local planning authority to establish a clear need based on:

- existing sources of evidence
- locally specific evidence including water cycle studies.
- consultations with the local water and sewerage company, the Environment Agency and catchment partnerships.
- consideration of the impact on viability and housing supply of such a requirement.

See [paragraph 013 of the Housing: optional technical standards](#)

¹ Anglian Water Strategic Statement

Is there a local need in the Anglian Water company area?

The Environment Agency 'Water Stressed Areas Final Classification (2013)'² is a primary source of evidence which supports a tighter water efficiency standard. It identifies areas of serious water stress where household demand for water is (or likely to be) a high proportion of the current effective rainfall available to meet that demand.

The Environment Agency advises the Secretary of State that the areas classified as 'Serious' in the final classification table should be designated as 'Areas of serious water stress'.

The Anglian Water region is identified as an area of serious water stress. This means that if you are serviced by Anglian Water the area is considered to be at serious water stress. In our view, this provides evidence to suggest that the optional higher water efficiency standard should be applied to help manage this stress.

In addition, Anglian Water's Water Resource Management Plan 2019³ identifies how Anglian Water will manage the supply and demand balance over the next 25 years. It shows what demand and supply measures will be introduced to manage the longer term challenge of population increase, climate change, drought resilience and growing environmental needs. It is currently forecasted that our average supply-demand balance will be 249MI/d by 2045. In response, reducing the levels of consumption will help to counteract the reduction in resource availability as well as other proactive alterations.

Viability

The Local Planning Authority should consider viability taking account of local circumstances and policy requirements, but research has shown that the cost of the optional higher water efficiency standard and associated cost can be as low as £6-9⁴ per dwelling. We therefore consider that this does not make Local Plans, or individual development proposals, unviable.

Recommended Wording

In areas where Anglian Water is the water undertaker in the area, we recommend that the following wording is included in appropriate Local Plan policies, and implemented through of planning conditions, as set out in Building Regulations.

"Development proposals should demonstrate:

Dwellings meet the Building Regulation optional higher water efficiency standard of 110 litres per person per day, as set out in building regulations part G2."

Where more than one water company serve the area the local planning authority should contact the water company and consider specific wording for the respective boundaries. This is appropriate because despite close geographical proximity, areas may have their water resources from outside the local area.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-stressed-areas-2013-classification>

³ <http://www.anglianwater.co.uk/environment/our-commitment/our-plans/water-resource-management.aspx>

⁴ [The Housing Standards Review Cost Impact report \(2014\)](#) prepared for DCLG advises that the cost of introducing such a standard would be between £6-£9 per dwelling.