



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Baroness Taylor of Stevenage

*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing
and Local Government*

2 Marsham Street
London
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Our reference: MC2026/03871

Helen Whately MP
House of Commons
London
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21st February 2026

Dear *Helen*

Thank you for your email of 2 February regarding the availability of adequate water infrastructure to support new housing development in your constituency. I appreciate the strength of feeling locally following the recent water outages in your area.

The Government recognises the importance of ensuring there is a sufficient and resilient supply of water to enable sustainable growth, protect the natural environment, and support robust drainage and wastewater systems for both current and future demand.

In just one year, the Government has put in place the building blocks to ensure the water sector is better positioned to support economic growth and population change. We have worked hard to secure £104 billion of private sector investment in the water sector over the next five years. This investment is critical to upgrading infrastructure, improving resilience and ensuring long term capacity.

Alongside this, the Government will introduce root and branch reform to revolutionise the water industry. Working in partnership with water companies, investors and communities, we will introduce a new Water Reform Bill to modernise the entire system so that it is fit for the decades to come. This will deliver cleaner rivers, with sewage pollution cut in half by the end of the decade, stronger regulation through the creation of a single regulator overseeing the entire water sector, and a clearer and more stable regulatory framework to attract record levels of investment and turn the tide for good.

The Government has also taken strong action to ensure water companies provide a resilient and reliable water supply. New enforcement powers introduced through the Water (Special Measures Act) give regulators the tools they need to take tougher action where companies fail consumers or the environment. This includes automatic penalties, penalties applied at a lower standard of proof, and powers to ban performance bonuses.

Operational oversight has also been significantly strengthened. Regulators have launched 87 investigations into water companies, and Environment Agency inspections have increased by nearly

400 percent, with further expansion planned to reach 10,000 inspections per year from April 2026. These measures improve compliance, support early detection of infrastructure issues, and reduce the risk of supply interruptions.

As set out in the Water White Paper, we are modernising the regulatory framework through the creation of a single water regulator, the introduction of no notice inspections, new MOT style infrastructure checks, and strengthened asset health requirements. Together, these reforms will move companies towards a more preventative maintenance model and deliver a more reliable water supply for households and businesses.

At the same time, reforms to water planning will help ensure supply keeps pace with population growth. A new regional water planning function will bring together local authorities, regulators, developers and water companies to coordinate supply planning, infrastructure needs and environmental considerations. This will improve the link between local development plans and water capacity and ensure cumulative impacts are properly considered.

Water companies are also required to prepare Pollution Incident Reduction Plans and Special Administration contingency plans. These measures strengthen accountability and help ensure continuity of critical services, even where a company is underperforming.

The Government has also strengthened customer protections through an updated Guaranteed Standards Scheme, which more than doubles minimum compensation for households and businesses when water companies fail to meet service standards, including where supply is interrupted or boil water notices are issued. These protections ensure fair redress and reinforce expectations on companies to prevent avoidable failures.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is ready to communicate the updated protocol on water supply resilience, customer protections, and expectations for water company performance. The strengthened regulatory framework, enhanced planning system, and improved customer safeguards provide a clear basis on which to reassure constituents and set out Government action.

Turning to planning policy, the Government is currently consulting on a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that includes clearer, 'rules based' policies for decision-making and plan-making, designed to make planning policy easier to use and underpin the delivery of faster and simpler local plans. The consultation includes a range of proposals, including a revised presumption in favour of sustainable development. This presumption will apply to all land within settlements. It will also apply to land outside settlements, where it is within reasonable walking distance of a well-connected station. This 'default yes' will not grant automatic permission on suitable sites or remove appropriate local oversight of the development control process. We are clear that suitable proposals should be approved unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects.

The consultation can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system> and will remain open for responses until 10 March 2026. We would welcome your views on these proposals.

I appreciate your invitation to visit your constituency and the opportunity to hear directly from residents and local representatives. Unfortunately, due to existing commitments in the Secretary of State's diary and my own, it will not be possible to meet at this time. However, I would be pleased to keep your invitation under consideration for the future.

Thank you again for writing on this important matter.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Taylor', written in a cursive style.

BARONESS TAYLOR OF STEVENAGE
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government