



The countryside charity  
Cambridgeshire  
and Peterborough

PRESS RELEASE

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## CAMBRIDGE-ON-SEA?

Countryside campaigners say whichever party is elected to government must call an immediate halt to major development on flood plains or risk turning the clock back 400 years before the Fens were drained.

Dr Alan James, Chairman of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough CPRE, the countryside charity, says climate change is accelerating the rate of sea level rise while the East of England continues to sink at a rate of 1mm each year. "That may seem tiny but it won't be long before the Fens are flooded regularly, then permanently. We're not talking the far distant future here, perhaps thirty, forty or fifty years? If we're not careful, Ely will be an island once more and Cambridge-on-Sea could become a reality."

He says this is hard to grasp when Cambridgeshire is one of the driest areas of the country and depends on ground water extraction for its water supplies. However, he says over-extraction is causing these supplies to dry up. This alone, he says is reason enough to curb development.

"After the June we've had so far, it's difficult to believe we are in fact having increasingly hot, dry summers which add to the problem. On the one hand, there isn't enough water to sustain future large-scale development, on the other, in Cambridgeshire we have one of the country's largest flood plains where heavy rainfall leads to surface flooding. It's tricky to marry up these anomalies but unless we do, and take action now, the stage is set for future disaster."

CPRE accepts that funds are limited but says it's crucial for any future government to look at the big environmental picture alongside major developments plans. They also say urgent investment is needed to raise river banks to protect the region from flooding. Dr James says research has shown that if farmland floods with water from tidal rivers, up to seven years' worth of crops can be lost, not because of the lasting effects of saline damage to the land, salt washes out, but because of nematodes contained within the water.

He says present initiatives aren't embracing the full problem. "Anglian Water plans to pipe water from north west Lincolnshire, across the Fens to Cambridge and Bury St Edmunds. But the fact is, the Fens are not static – they move and a pipeline will break. They also plan to build a new reservoir between Doddington and Chatteris. However, this area is a dead cert for future flooding and the originally planned water course, the Ouse Washes, are saline. Now Anglian Water are proposing to take water from further upstream near Bluntisham, pipe it north to Doddington and then back south again to Coton – but the river is still tidal up to Brownhill Stauch and therefore saline. Where's the joined up thinking here?" asked Dr James. "The new government, whatever its political persuasion, needs to take radical action before it's too late."