

Agency demands strict water rules

By Christina Papas

Further housing development in the South East must be strictly regulated to ensure that water efficiency measures are incorporated, the Environment Agency has insisted.

The agency's chief executive Barbara Young said last week that the region is suffering from the driest period since the 1976 drought, with some parts of Kent and Sussex experiencing some of the worst conditions since 1934.

Young warned that further housing development in the region will increase pressure on the environment and that any new-build housing must incorporate water-saving fixtures and fittings. Water-efficient design can help reduce household water use by up to 25 per cent, she claimed.

She added that the government must encourage builders to adopt measures for sustainable building and called for compulsory metering for homes in water shortage areas.

"Our water is in limited supply, yet domestic water use is rising," said Young. "We need to act now to protect our future. This means



South East homes: infrastructure must accompany development

removing hurdles for water-efficient buildings and appliances through water fitting and building regulations, a sustainable building code and appliance standards and labelling."

Young's comments coincided with a pledge from planning minister Yvette Cooper that the government will implement necessary infrastructure alongside housing growth in the region.

"We have always been clear that building homes for the next generation will be firmly linked to increased investment in transport infrastructure," Cooper promised following a meeting

with the South East England Regional Assembly.

Meanwhile, the Environment Agency voiced its concerns over water extraction from the UK's rivers and boreholes this week, arguing that almost ten per cent of catchment areas are being over-exploited.

Findings revealed that the Thames in south-west London is at particular risk. At Kingston the river is running at 28 per cent of its average flow for this time of year. Groundwater levels are also suffering, with water levels almost 10m lower than normal at this time of year.