

## Water rates

Foul and surface water drainage are combined in London, increasing the cost of purification. Like other companies, Thames Water struggles with leaks. The water mains are currently being replaced, with works to contain sewer flooding.

Ofwat gave water companies power to charge non-domestic customers according to their hard surface areas; some companies in north and east England have begun to do so. This is bad news for churches and charities. Church House has complained; and the government frowns on excessive charging like this; so water companies are reconsidering. The Thames area is so far unaffected, though Thames Water did have plans to introduce 'run-off charging' from April 2010.

## Drinking water

Tap water in London should be safe to drink.

It looks nicer if it has been passed through a Brita water filter. Better than a filter under the sink!

Bottled water is much less sustainable environmentally – let's give it up! Mineral water bottles can be re-filled from the tap.

## Flooding

Churches in the Staines area have been risk-assessed for flood water flowing down the Thames. This happened in the summer of 2007. Interestingly, the floor surge travelled quite slowly – slower than the water in the river!

There was time to lay up a store of sandbags, which we still have in store for use in similar emergencies.

The east of England is tipping down by a foot a century, and London is sinking at the same rate into the clay. Sea level rises due to global warming (about 3½ mm/ year) are on top of this – that means almost one metre a century total rises in mean sea levels!

However it is thought the Thames Barrier should cope for a few decades more, so long as it goes on being maintained as well as now.

Thought and action are continually given to raising defences to each side of the barrier; there are even the beginnings of plans for an entirely new barrier, further out in the Thames Estuary.

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## "Waste not want not"!

How we use material resources, and what we do with things when they're worn out, are almost as important as our energy use and carbon emissions.

The same goes for conserving water.

- **'Reduce, re-use, recycle'** is a well-known motto. If we use less we won't have to throw it away. If someone can re-use it, that's good! Otherwise let's recycle, or compost, our rubbish, if we can – never put in with general rubbish to go to landfill, if we can possibly avoid it.
- **Water and waste add to climate change** – water supply, moving and recycling waste, all use fuel and emit carbon. Landfill emits methane (much worse even than CO<sub>2</sub>.)
- **Water** – drought and flooding affect us in different weather. Either it pours, or we get no rain for weeks! We need to conserve water when we get it.

Let's apply these principles to how we run our churches – also at home!

### **Michael Bye**

*Chair, Shrinking the Footprint Steering Group*  
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## Recycling

Recycling is done in different ways by different local authorities. Some ask you to sort it for yourselves, others pick it all up together ('commingled') and sort it later. Not all councils take garden waste (they don't have to).

- It's important not to contaminate sorted waste for recycling – eg allowing crisp packets to get into the garden waste. This can cause a whole load to be sent to landfill instead.
- You may be able to have special items such as electrical goods collected on a special visit – by prior request.
- Kerbside bring-banks eg for textiles are also useful.

## Water recycling

Even when it rains profusely, water remains a scarce resource in the UK and London especially. It has to be recycled and purified seven times on average! Thames Water has got very good at this.

Water is costly in energy terms. Anyone who has carried a bucket of water uphill knows how heavy it is, and the energy needed to move it! A lot of electricity is used to pump water – this adds to our carbon footprint.



## Did you know?

- The UK produces enough waste to fill Trafalgar Square up to the height of Nelson's Column, every day! Where on earth (literally) does it all go?
- Up till recently, a lot of waste has been sent abroad, eg to China. This gets less easy, as fewer containers are being received due to the credit crunch, therefore not available for return trips. But it's not right to export our waste – we should clear up our own mess!
- There has been a lot of moaning in the popular press about councils weighing or charging for bin collections. In fact they do have that right. But a Council's arrangements must not make a profit. This is not a stealth tax, it's a way of dealing with rubbish more effectively.
- More than 13 billion carrier bags are distributed in the UK every year! Many go to landfill sites, somewhat less bad if they are tied up with other waste inside them, worse if they are loose and can be taken by gulls to feed their chicks, arguably worse still if left to fly around in the street where they get stuck in trees and hedges and may be a threat to nesting birds.
- There is a carpet of our plastic waste the size of Texas, swept up by ocean currents, in the middle of the Pacific! Albatross chicks choke on it. A project is now underway to survey it and make a plan to clear it up and re-cycle it.

## Thames Tideway Tunnels

We still need to plan for increased water charges.

- Thames Water has applied to Ofwat for a 17% increase across the board over five years (about two-thirds in the first year).
- This is partly to pay for new water mains, partly for two new giant relief sewers to stop sewage spilling into the Thames, and killing the fish.
- This now happens more than 50 times per year – it gets more frequent as we concrete over our gardens or patios (the water should sink to the water table, but instead it runs off into the drains, together with raw sewage).
- Benefits also include reclaiming water which would otherwise have been wasted. So much of our rainfall is now concentrated in short cloudbursts. People can't understand when there is a hosepipe ban in August after a soaking wet winter the same year! Yet most of that water runs straight into the Thames and isn't used.
- So we ought to support the new tunnels, for the environment as well as our own sake – including plain decency and hygiene – even though it will cost us so much (we'll be subsidised by customers west of London by the way).
- This vast engineering project will take at least a decade or two to complete.