Contribution from
ALDEBURGH

Water Conservation

The original settlement was probably based upon the presence of fresh water springs around the edge of the higher land upon which the modern town is situated. These springs result from the geological strata that forms the high land and has a band of clay running through it. Above this clay is water bearing sand that is replenished by rainfall. One such spring is situated on the Town Steps and the pump with its collection tank is still preserved.

As the town evolved greater supplies were required and in the 1840's a waterworks was built to serve the high-class development created by the Garrets, who owned the ironworks in the adjacent town of Leiston. A fresh source of water was then obtained from the Crag Strata which underlies the whole town and this was stored in a water tower, now disused. The provision of both water and sewerage facilities was installed by the Aldeburgh Borough Council who maintained it until the 1960's when rationalisation of rural water supplies allowed the Lowestoft Water Company to take over all supplies in the coastal belt. The crag water in Aldeburgh was then abandoned in favour of water obtained from the Chalk Strata further inland that now serves the three towns of Aldeburgh, Leiston and Saxmundham.

During the post war era agricultural irrigation in the Alde - Ore catchment developed at a great pace and now accounts for annual employment valued at 7 million pounds (10 million euros) and involves some 10 million pounds (14,6 million euros) worth of investment in equipment. Whilst the water consumption for irrigation is not a large proportion of the total annual consumption, it can be a very large proportion of the total in dry summer periods. It is then that is vital to vegetable growing which has developed in areas that were heathland before the 1950's.

This agricultural demand, mainly obtained from underground resources but also from inland rivers, lead to an Act of Parliament in 1962 requiring all abstractions to be licensed. The regulations have continually become more onerous as demands for water having risen through increased population and tourism. In some very dry years when East Anglia's normally low rainfall of ssome 500mm falls even lower licenses have been halved.

In the last two decades domestic supplies have increasingly been subjected to metering instead of charges being based upon rateable value. The cost is presently 2, 10 pounds (3 euros) per cubic meter for supply, disposal and environmental costs.

At present all Aldeburgh wastewater is discharged to a long sea outfall but the future may well lead to the imposition of regulations to make individual householders install equipment to enable the re-use of "grey water". This would involve the storage of water used for washing purposes only, so that it can be re-used for flushing toilets.

Central government are advocating more house building in the region, but fail to consider water availability, leaving the responsibility for water supply to the Water Companies who have a statutory obligation to make a supply available. To meet this obligation water companies are now considering desalination, but this will damage the environment by using more energy. Conservation of water may be a more environmentally satisfactory, either by recharge of the aquifers or storage in agricultural reservoirs.