

Well, spring has finally arrived. Am I saying that because, after banging on about how it never stops raining here in the fells, we had a rain-free week, leading to the local Co-op running out of salad? No; nor because we took the decision to wash our winter coats and hang them out to dry before putting them away for storage. The weatherman promptly forecast snow!

The reason is the same as every year: along with the narcissi and the first lineful of washing comes reports in the environment news pages of hosepipe bans in the drought-stricken South East.

According to The Guardian, around one third of those to whom the ban applies will simply ignore it. Are these the same people who will squeeze the last drop of fuel into their tanks at the hint of a tanker-drivers' strike; or who will park their 4WD gas guzzler on a disabled parking space because it's two yards less far to walk, despite the fact that they actually can easily walk the extra two yards?

I've pointed out before that, just because we find it ironic to be talking about drought when it seems to rain (or snow!) most of the year, that doesn't mean it ain't there. Water is becoming a commodity here in England and people need to wake up to that fact. Having said that, other environment news stories are advertising courses in flood defences for the kind of consultants to be found in the environment directory of this site.

The reason most of the ban-flouters cite, apparently, is the fact that the water companies waste millions of gallons a year in leaks. That, too, is criminal and should be treated as such.

It's difficult to find anything good to say about the new National Planning Policy Framework, announced on 27 March, but a grudging 'about time, too' goes to the emphasis on brownfield development. I wonder how long that will last, though, when the brownfield-first policy begins to interfere with the presumption of consent for 'sustainable development'. The introduction of the 5% deposit scheme for new build only flies in the face of the policy itself. In the past couple of years we have seen inner cities blighted by lack of funds to refurbish existing, perfectly sound

homes to modern standards.

At its best, sustainable housing development can encompass the conversion of Victorian mills into flats – often, because of the nature of early industrialisation, with its own bijou waterside ambience: unlike what happened just a couple of miles from here when a landmark mill was allowed to decay and then demolished.

Chris Stokes