



25 September 2023

SENT VIA EMAIL

Councillor Bethia Thomas

Vale of White Horse District Council

Dear Bethia,

Thank you for your email and the opportunity to meet you and Mark to discuss our plans to provide a secure and sustainable water supply for future generations, including the proposed new reservoir in Oxfordshire.

In your email you raise concerns about our commitment to engage with the Council and local communities and seek our assurance on this. I want to reassure you that we are fully committed to working openly and constructively as we develop the proposals for the new reservoir, and in this response I have provided an overview of our current engagement and future plans which I trust will give you that assurance.

- We have an established programme of technical engagement with regulators and stakeholders on a range of aspects of the reservoir design including landscape, transport and heritage. In 2021 we set up topic-specific Technical Liaison Groups (TLGs) and invited officers of the Vale of White Horse District Council to join the TLGs, to enable early participation and guide the development of the project. The programme of technical engagement has continued through the intervening period. In early 2023, we reached a formal agreement to fund officers of the Council to enable continued participation in the TLGs, which included the backdating of costs to cover involvement and review before the Gate 2 submission.
- We have held several briefings for officers and councillors on the strategic water resources management plan and the reservoir, including the most recent meeting on 15th September 2023 which focused on reservoir design and construction issues. The next briefing is planned for early 2024 and will discuss flood risk management.
- We have set up a dedicated community engagement team who are a point of contact for local residents and businesses to keep them informed and provide a channel for discussion.
- We have planned a programme of community engagement starting with the information events in October and November this year, followed by two stages of public consultation in summer 2024 and 2025. In summer 2024 we'll seek feedback on the draft masterplan, which will inform detailed scheme design, followed by a statutory consultation on the proposed final masterplan, scheme design and associated environmental information in summer 2025.
- We are also engaging potentially affected landowners at an early stage and we'll keep in close contact as we develop proposals.

You also raise the opportunities for mitigation which could help alleviate some local concerns about the reservoir. I completely agree with the Council on this; we want to create a reservoir that not only secures the vital water resources we need but one that is sensitive to its locality and delivers significant long-term environmental and community benefits. Our reservoir at Farmoor showcases some of the opportunities with unique habitat for wildlife and a great location for anglers, paddleboarders and sailors, three nature reserves, and a café for those wishing to take a break from the accessible paths and walks. In February 2023 we wrote to the Council, and other stakeholders, to provide a statement of our commitments which reflected issues raised by the Council and local communities and set out our commitment to consider and develop these wider benefits. This statement of community commitments is attached in Annex 1.

We are planning to set up a forum to give stakeholders and representatives of the local community the opportunity to have their say on the design of the reservoir including access, landscaping and recreation use and would welcome the opportunity to discuss our initial thoughts on the forum with the Council.

I trust I have assured you of our commitment to work openly and constructively and bring forward a reservoir that will create a lasting positive legacy for the local area and community.

I look forward to continuing to work with you.

Yours sincerely

**Simon Adams**

Programme Director - Strategic Resource Options



Update for local community



Simon Adams

info@thames-wrmp.co.uk

16 February 2023

## Community Commitments

You will be aware that Thames and Affinity are currently consulting on our draft Water Resources Management Plans (dWRMP), which set out how we are going to provide a safe and resilient water supply for our customers for the next 50 years. These plans include a proposal for reservoir to support the south east region, near Abingdon, known as the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO).

We are looking forward to welcoming visitors to our community event at Steventon Village Hall on Saturday 18 February between 12pm and 6pm, where we hope to provide a chance for people to learn more about the dWRMP, but we also expect the greatest interest will be in SESRO and the choice of a reduced size in the plan.

From listening to the concerns of the community we are aware that we need to do more to reassure people that no decision has been made to proceed. Before any approval could be granted a rigorous planning process would scrutinise the proposal and be subject to approval by the Secretary of State.

We are also aware that people may have been presented with a range of information about the reservoir but that some of it risks being misleading. With this in mind we would like to commit to you that, should the reservoir go ahead, we will:

- Work with the community to develop a design that delivers opportunities for accessible recreation, leisure and education.
- Be open to ideas for community partnerships, including the creation of new open spaces, orchards and woodlands.
- Work with schools and colleges to develop opportunities for local training and employment.
- Work with local groups to incorporate activities such as sailing, fishing, bird watching, paddle/wind sports, running, cycling and trail walking – as with other lakes across the UK.
- Create new wetland habitats, that will help increase biodiversity and capture carbon.

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- Create new wetland habitats, that will help increase biodiversity and capture carbon.
- Provide opportunities for local access for the residents of the nearest villages, with visitors from further away being routed to a dedicated visitors centre.
- Design embankments that are grassed, with gradual slopes, landscaped and set back from the nearest villages.
- Comply with the Reservoirs Act 1975, which sets strict safety standards and requires the appointment of an independent engineer to ensure they are followed.
- Design drainage systems to collect surface water and manage it, helping to reduce future flood risk.
- Develop plans that locate site entrances away from the local villages and maximise the use of the railway to minimise movements by road.
- Carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment and develop a Code of Construction Practice that shows how we have addressed the concerns of local communities.
- Deliver best value for customers – learning from the success of Thames Tideway Tunnel, which is being constructed by a new, competitively tendered Infrastructure Provider, from which our shareholders do not profit.
- Engage in a continuous dialogue with local communities through a dedicated engagement manager and more formal consultation as part of the rigorous planning process.

We would welcome your views and ask if there are additional commitments we might consider, to help reassure local communities. We hope to see you at the event on Saturday.

Yours sincerely

*Simon Adams*

Programme Director – Thames Water Strategic Resource Options

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