

Thames Water new Reservoir Plan – briefing on the consultation

Wasn't the reservoir rejected several years ago?

Yes. Thames Water proposed a 100Mm³ (100 Million cubic metres) reservoir which was rejected at a public inquiry in 2010. The inquiry said the case was not fit-for-purpose and they had not properly explored alternatives. They were obliged to wait before re-introducing the proposal, now half as big again at 150Mm³. The latest proposal is contained in Thames Water's *draft Water Resource Management Plan for the period 2019-2024* (referred to as 'dWRMP19'). They issued a draft in March for consultation which resulted in a large number of changes. These were sufficiently significant to require a second consultation on a revised draft which is now underway and ends on 28th November.

Why has a reservoir been re-introduced?

In the first draft of the dWRMP19 in March, the case for the reservoir was to protect supplies for London and the Thames Valley. However, the result of the first consultation was that they had to significantly revise the population forecasts downwards (by 1.5M in 2100) and dramatically reduce leakage. This means that additional resources to meet the needs of London and the Thames Valley are now not required until at least the 2060s. In the second draft, the case for a reservoir has changed *and has been brought forward*. The revised draft now seeks to make the case by including the needs of neighbouring Affinity Water, which supplies Hertfordshire; the two companies are now jointly proposing the reservoir. However, Affinity Water does not require additional resources until the late 2050s and they need very little additional water compared to the size of the proposed reservoir, which would create a huge surplus.

But surely we need the water from the reservoir locally, just look at all the housing going up all around us

We don't. Because Thames Water has been obliged to correct the population forecasts, which take account of all the existing and planned house building and has also been required to reduce leakage, this has removed the need for additional resources, at the very least until the 2060s. There are other schemes to address the need for additional water at that time which don't involve building a large reservoir anywhere. One is a scheme to take more water at Teddington which Thames Water has now abandoned in the new draft plan. The Environment Agency had raised some serious concerns about the scheme but did not say it should be rejected. Another is a water transfer scheme which is described a little later.

Won't we all benefit from the reservoir?

No, at least not as Thames Water customers – some of the water would eventually be used by Affinity Water and in the meantime Thames Water propose to start selling it to other water companies in the South East of England, except that all these other water companies have recently withdrawn their interest.

Thames Water claims many environmental benefits of the proposed reservoir but these are largely to replace what would be destroyed in its construction. There would however be some water-based leisure activities available, but Thames Water has also been considering floating solar panels on the surface to create electricity although details are unclear.

Isn't the reservoir needed to deal with climate change? Just look at the summer we've just had

Thames Water has stated that the reservoir will provide drought resilience. However this argument doesn't hold water (*sorry but it had to be in here somewhere!*). The reservoir would be filled from the Thames during periods of high flow and then water released when the flow is low. However, this would simply shift the storage from the existing London reservoirs to Abingdon. In the event of a two-year drought, even now there is insufficient water in the Thames to reliably refill the London reservoirs over winter so another large reservoir wouldn't help.

What is needed is 'new' water to provide proper drought resilience. This is what the National Infrastructure Commission has said that Thames Water should focus on – inter-regional transfer schemes to bring water from less drought affected areas into the South East. The new water would come from the River Severn via a new pipeline that would take only about 5 years to construct and would be hidden once complete. There are two approaches; the first simply requires permission from the Environment Agency to extract water from the Severn which is likely to be granted. This is called the 'unsupported' scheme because it doesn't require any assistance from other water companies. The second scheme, the 'supported' scheme involves assistance from other water companies, United Utilities and Severn Trent Water, to access their reservoirs that are fed by the Severn. The schemes are in Thames Water's plan but way in the future (not until 2080) with detailed analysis not starting for another 5 years. Thames Water claims this is because of the costs of the schemes but these costs are disputed by United Utilities and others and Thames Water will not make the details available for scrutiny.

Would a reservoir actually be so bad?

The proposed reservoir would be bunded (which means above ground with a stone wall to contain the water) and would be the largest of its type in Europe. It would be nearly 11 times the size of the reservoir at Farmoor. At 4 square miles, it would be nearly the same size as Heathrow airport. The walls would be 4 times the height of a two storey house and then there would be extraction towers above the walls. It would be the tallest structure in the Vale. Some of the houses in the adjacent villages would be only 200 metres from the wall.

The reservoir would be built on a square mile of flood plain which would prevent flood water from draining away. Some properties in the neighbouring villages already flood during periods of heavy rain. Thames Water hasn't done a full environmental assessment yet to analyse the flooding consequences but they are already requesting more land to try and alleviate the inevitable problems.

The reservoir would take between 12 and 15 years to construct and fill, assuming no delays. A new railway line would be built to bring the 4 million tonnes of stone onto the site with slow trains running every night. However, Thames Water has never built a reservoir (they inherited the existing reservoirs), so there is concern that the project may not run to plan.

A reservoir is surely better than a garden town of 30,000 houses, or an airport?

The local plan has no provision for anything other than a reservoir for the land in question. This local plan runs to 2031 so nothing will be built at least until then. Whilst there are no guarantees, if the reservoir does not go ahead, it is still unlikely that any major housing would be developed. Since the 2010 reservoir plan was rejected, Didcot was awarded Garden Town status by the government in 2015 which removes the need for an additional garden town nearby. The land released by the RAF in Abingdon will be used for housing, again reducing demand for additional schemes. Most recently, in reviewing the Local Plan Part 2, the

planning inspector has said that the South East Vale should not get any more than 11,949 new homes, 2,326 lower than the currently planned 14,275. This may result in the removal of proposed new sites in East Hanney from the Local Plan Part 2.

Regarding an airport on the land in question, a four-runway airport was put forward to the Airports Commission in 2013 by an architect firm in Bristol. The Commission's final report published in 2015 recommended expansion at Heathrow. The Commission found no case for an airport at Abingdon, so this risk is no longer present.

Who will pay for the reservoir?

You will. The final cost of the reservoir is unclear as the figures that Thames Water has released vary considerably but it will probably exceed £1,500 Million, perhaps as much as £1,900 Million assuming no delays. Splitting the costs between the two proposing companies has reduced transparency. Whatever the cost, it will be added to Thames Water's customers' bills. Thames Water will have to raise capital debt to finance the reservoir. The £90 Million per year cost of this debt would be passed on to Thames Water's customers in accordance with regulator rules.

What is the right way forward?

A public inquiry. At a public inquiry a thorough analysis of the options would be properly explored in an open and transparent way. Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) will decide on whether to hold a public inquiry. The number of individual objections on Thames Water's plans will be significant in his decision to hold a public inquiry.

I'm still not quite convinced, I have more questions

OK, there may be a GARD meeting coming up that you could attend or we can arrange for your questions to be answered. Please contact Chris Harrison on 07885 288422 or harrisonchrisd@gmail.com.

I am convinced, what can I do to help?

The three things to do, in order of priority are:

1. **Respond to the Thames Water consultation.** This is the most critical thing to do and it must be done, individually, by Wednesday 28th November. Either:
 - a. Visit <https://haveyoursay.thameswater.co.uk/engagement/shape-your-water-future-revisions-to-the-plan/> and answer the four questions (see below for points to make) or
 - b. Write an email to consultations@thameswater.co.uk
2. **Email our local MP Ed Vaizey.** Ed is against the proposed reservoir. The number of emails he receives will strengthen his hand in calling for a public inquiry. His email address is ed.vaizey.mp@parliament.uk
3. **Join GARD** – this is the very effective and experienced local group opposing the reservoir. Boosting their membership numbers is an important illustration of local opposition to help the case for a public inquiry. Lifetime membership is £10. Complete the attached form and email to the GARD Secretary Deborah Bennett at gard.secretary@gmail.com

Points to make for the Thames Water consultation / email to Ed Vaizey

Q1 – Leakage Reduction

Points to make:

- This is welcome

Q2 – Removing the Teddington scheme

Points to make:

- It is premature to remove this scheme
- The Environment Agency raised serious concerns but did not say it should be abandoned
- Thames Water should address the EA's concerns and re-assess its viability

Q3 – Bringing the Abingdon reservoir forward

Points to make:

- The needs of Affinity Water do not require the proposed reservoir to be brought forward
- The Affinity Water plan shows that additional resources are not required until the late 2050s
- Bringing the proposed reservoir forward would create a huge surplus which is not justified by Affinity's needs
- Additional demand from Affinity Water can be satisfied by far less impactful and quicker schemes than the proposed reservoir such as a modest sized re-use plant or the 'unsupported' Severn Thames Transfer scheme.

Q4 – General

Points to make:

- The case for the proposed Oxfordshire reservoir has not been made
- The case has been shifted to the needs of Affinity Water which do not justify the proposed reservoir
- The proposed reservoir does not provide drought resilience because it would simply shift water storage from the London reservoirs to Oxfordshire
- What is needed is to bring 'new' water into the region, as championed by the National Infrastructure Commission
- The Severn Thames Transfer would achieve this and could be on stream more quickly than the proposed reservoir
- The cost breakdown of all proposed schemes should be made available to stakeholders to enable proper scrutiny
- The assertion that the proposed reservoir will provide capacity to other water companies in the South East is not defensible
- TW should respond fully to the objections to the proposed reservoir put forward by stakeholders in the first consultation, in particular the flooding implications and temporary and sustained environmental impacts.