

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 27 September 2021 19:13
To: RAPID
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Gate 1 Representation - South Abingdon Reservoir

To RAPID Gate Review Committee,

I write to you today regarding the proposed Thames Water / Affinity Water South Oxfordshire Reservoir Project. By way of introduction, I [REDACTED], which as you know, is located adjacent to the proposed site for the South Oxfordshire reservoir. I am therefore a major stakeholder in this project and unsurprisingly, I am seriously concerned that the RAPID group have passed the project through gate 1 which grants access to funding for further investigation of this project's viability. I wish to object to this project on the following grounds:

Location

First and foremost, why has this site been earmarked for this project? The idea is that this reservoir would serve London and parts of the midlands, so why is it being located in rural Oxfordshire, in this specific spot? I have not seen any justification for this location. Indeed the only geographic explanation is the land is relatively flat. However, it's flat for miles and miles, so why does it need to be located between East Hanney and Steventon, specifically? I can answer that for you, it simply does not. An alternative site should be found which is more remote, located away from towns/villages and does not create risks of flooding to people.

Having read the Thames Water proposal document, there is plenty of spiel and fancy infographics trying to justify why a reservoir is needed, however, there isn't any reference to, and justification for, the site that's been proposed. There's pages and pages of alleged validation for the project based on water projections and other contentious and quite frankly laughable justifications. However, the consideration for RAPID shouldn't even need to get this far. The most basic of questions should have been asked from the outset. That is, "Is this project suitable for its intended location"? The answer here is painfully obvious: no it is not. Bizarrely this hasn't occurred and the project has now passed through gate 1 ...! How has this even happened? The scope and scale of this project and complete lack of geological need for it to be located here, means all other remarks about water supply needs are null and void. The villages of East Hanney, Grove, Marcham, Steventon, West Hendred to name but a few are all located directly adjacent to the proposed site and house too many people in close proximity to the reservoir. It's unacceptable in all honesty. To suggest locating a project of this scope and scale so close to so many people is absurd and I am baffled why the project wasn't dismissed out of hand on this basis alone. Put simply, the reservoir is too big, it negatively impacts too many people by

virtue of its location/proximity and creates far too many risks for local people. In short, find an alternative site!

Who from the RAPID committee has actually visited the site to assess for themselves the impact this project would have and the proximity to local residents? Even looking at a map of the local area shows that Thames Water is trying to squeeze in a monumentally large reservoir between several bustling villages. It's unsafe, unjustified and unsupported to locate this reservoir here. There are plenty of other locations in Oxfordshire and surrounding counties with a much lower population density where this project could/should be located. Any assertion from Thames Water that this project has any actual support from people that matter is a false narrative. Based on location alone, this project is unsafe, unjustified and grossly inappropriate.

Flooding

The prospect of the reservoir inevitably saturating local land in an area which already has flooding problems during severe weather, thereby proliferating the flooding issues along with the significant risk of flooding due to poor maintenance/terrorism risk mean that local residents have grave concerns regarding the safety of this project.

Let's not forget the sheer size of the project, it is massive in scale. It consists of 10km long earth dam, 25 metres high to keep the water in. the scale of this is simply mind boggling. Following on from the previous point, the impact this will have on the local water table is frightening. The local villages already suffer from flooding during severe weather. The effect this dam will have on the local water table would create an unacceptable risk of flooding for local people. For further details of the impact and risk of flooding as a consequence of this project, see the GARD (Group Against Reservoir Project) response to the Ofwat Consultation document.

Access

An additional concern is that the project would take 10 years to build and mean that the Steventon-Hanney road would be closed since the reservoir site would straddle this road. This means cutting off a key route between Wantage in the East and Didcot in the West. To remove this road is unacceptable I am afraid. There is talk that the road would be relocated to the south around the edges of the reservoir but this is proposed to be done at the end of the reservoir project. So what's being said is that convenient access to the West is stopped for 10 years to accommodate this monstrosity of a reservoir. At which point a new road will be built (supposedly). If this project goes ahead, the new road should be built first, NOT after.

Viability

What I also have a major problem with is that Thames Water and Affinity Water constantly under-play the above issues, the objections of local people along with many other significant concerns as raised by GARD and yet

somehow, this project has been able to get to the stage it has. Why are these concerns, issues and objections not being given due credence by RAPID in their decision making? Indeed I note that in 2010 this project was denied as part of the Public Inquiry into WRMP09 which was their previous attempt to proceed with the project. This should have ended the project then and there and yet there is a fixation by Thames Water / Affinity Water to locate this project here which is bordering on the insane. Given the project's already been denied once, why are these companies still fixated on this same project / location several years later. Move onto something else! Why is RAPID allowing this project to still exist when it's already been decided it should not go ahead. It's verging on a public scandal that you have granted access to funding for this project at a time when public finances are strained as they are. They need to go back to the drawing board, find an alternative project, in a more suitable location and start again.

Moreover, given Thames Water is incapable of maintaining its current water infrastructure and is unable to fix leaks how do we expect them to safely maintain a reservoir of this scale? It's beyond scary to think what would happen if one of these dams was not maintained correctly and there was a breach. The death toll would be shocking. This is another reason the project should be closed down. Any attempt by Thames Water to gloss over this point should be examined in-depth. Their attempt to dismiss concerns around safety and flooding are as offensive as they are a serious lack of judgement. The project is simply not viable. As a prime example of Thames Water's (in)ability to deal with leaks and maintain infrastructure, it took them over 12 months to stop and fix the leak on Steventon hill! 12 months of leaking water! Frankly its pathetic and beyond incompetence by this point, and yet we are expected to let them proceed with the development of this reservoir and trust they will build and maintain it correctly? They certainly don't have the track record to suggest they will. I have only just touched on these points but will happily expand on them further if needs be. I trust I will receive a detailed response to the points raised here, and that RAPID will take the necessary steps to shut down this reservoir proposal. In summary, this project needs shutting down as soon as is practically possible.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,



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