

Ofwat/RAPID Gate 2 Draft Decisions – Formal Response from Garford Village Meeting

Dear Sir/Madam

We are responding with our views to the Draft Decisions document as recently published by RAPID.

More specifically, we are responding predominantly in relation to South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO).

We wish to comment on the following areas;

Demand

Environmental Impact

Adaptability

Flood Risk

Financial Impact

Water Quality

Demand

We believe the population estimates used are overstated and do not reflect recent ONS projections, thus creating an inflated demand to support the proposed plans to build a huge reservoir. Couple this with Thames Water's (TW) woeful record on leakage, 24% losses, and a lower than average national target to reduce water consumption, it is clear that TW's assumptions are questionable.

Environmental and Social Impact

To date, the information provided by TW on this crucial aspect of their plans is extremely scant. There are no details on the impact on our landscape, local communities, wildlife, sustainability and flooding. The plans make mention of a new reservoir being of social benefit, but we question this when unrestricted access to the biggest bunded reservoir in the country poses a major security risk. Moreover, if the structure is to be covered in solar panels, this further reduces the likelihood of it being used for leisure activities.

Adaptability

We can see no evidence that plans have been assessed to ensure adaptability. Once you start a major infrastructure project, such as building a huge reservoir, there is no turning back even if it proves to be somewhat of a white elephant. The Lowland Vale, on which the proposed reservoir is to be built, is sited in an area that, during extended periods of low rainfall is prone to drought. In times of high demand will the reservoir be fit for purpose? Once the structure is built, the landscape can never be returned to how it was. Why are the water companies not looking more seriously at water transfer planning, something that could be introduced far earlier than a reservoir and could be adapted to meet specific need.

Flood Risk

The reservoir will be built on a flood plain. The plans so far do not state how flood risk will be mitigated once it is built, moreover the flood storage area shown is insufficient. The communities in close proximity to the reservoir have suffered extensive flooding in the last 20 years and earlier this year The Hanneys, Grove and Steventon all experienced flash flooding following heavy downpours. Removing the flood plain can only lead to further flooding. Why has this major issue been side-lined? Where is the impact analysis? Impact analysis also needs to take into account all the new developments being built in this area and the cumulate effect on flooding.

Financial Impact

It is clear that a major capital project, such as a reservoir, will benefit shareholders. Investing in fixing leaks, improving existing infrastructure and reducing consumer demand does not provide this healthy return to shareholders, perhaps this explains the keenness of TW to pursue a high cost option to the detriment of its customers.

Water Quality

The plans state that SESRO will be a raw water storage option. Given TW's record of dumping sewage into our rivers, because of it's inability to treat water, it is of concern that when the reservoir is filled communities will be living in range of a huge expanse of untreated, algae contaminated water.

Garford Village Meeting – 11 May 2023