

Emma Reynolds MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs

Councillor Bethia Thomas
Leader of the Council

Bethia.Thomas@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Tel: 01235 422422
Abbey House
Abbey Close
Abingdon
OX14 3JE

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Dear Ms Reynolds,

Please accept my congratulations on your new role.

I am writing further to my previous correspondence with your two predecessors on the subject of the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO), that is Thames Water's (TW) proposal to build a reservoir of unprecedented scale in our district. When Steve Reed approved TW's Water Resource Management Plan (WRMP24) in September 2024, SESRO was included based on an estimated cost of £2.7 billion. In TW's recent Gate 3 submission to the regulatory authority RAPID this cost has ballooned to an astonishing £6.6 billion.

By unanimous vote at its meeting on 22 October, members of this council have resolved that I should write to you to express our view that this enormous cost increase has fatally undermined the case for SESRO when compared with alternative solutions for the provision of clean water to the south-east, and particularly the Severn to Thames Transfer (STT) scheme.

Given that the cost assumptions in TW's approved WRMP24 have now been shown by their own revision to be grotesquely understated, I now ask you to direct TW to prepare a new WRMP including more accurate financial assumptions and risk modelling.

Without a full new assessment there is a significant risk that the project ends up with costs escalating out of control and creating a major funding crisis with the government taking the blame for Thames Water's mismanagement.

Beyond this, we believe this has shown that the claim of "adaptive planning" must be borne out in the process and that Thames Water should not be permitted to take advantage of the process to "lock in" their preferred outcome at a stage too early for full clarity and reliability of budget and modelling, regardless of changes. We

therefore believe that the case for the primary alternative strategic option of the Severn Thames Transfer must be continually reassessed on equal terms considering any new cost information undermining the case for SESRO. It is therefore our request that:

- the RAPID Gate 3 decisions for SESRO and STT should be brought together
- any DCO process for SESRO should evaluate the cost-effectiveness and plausible timelines of the strategic water options in the TW WRMP24 (namely SESRO, STT and combination options), including up-to-date capital, finance, and operational costs directly associated with each, especially should these have changed since the relevant WRMP was approved
- going ahead with STT in place of SESRO should be regarded as a valid outcome of the DCO and RAPID Gate 3 processes, ensuring that TW cannot continue to escalate the costs and/or lengthen the timelines beyond those approved in any WRMP as they belatedly learn essential design elements and major issues.

Our previously expressed concerns around the safety of the proposed reservoir, the associated flood risk, and its environmental impact have still not been adequately addressed. Accordingly, I now ask whether you would be willing to meet with me and the MPs whose constituents are directly affected by the SESRO proposal? We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the serious concerns held by many of our residents.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Bethia Thomas
Leader of the Council

CC Paul Hickey, RAPID
Olly Glover MP
Charlie Maynard MP
Layla Moran MP