

The Rt. Hon. Emma Reynolds M.P.
Secretary of State for Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food & Rural
Affairs
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Councillor Bethia Thomas
Leader of the Council

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By email only

10 July 2026

Dear Ms Reynolds,

I am writing on behalf of Vale of White Horse District Council in relation to the White Horse Reservoir (formerly the South East Strategic Reservoir Option – SESRO) and Thames Water’s statutory public consultation on the proposal.

Public consultations within the UK are governed by the Gunning Principles. These are legal standards that define requirements for a fair and lawful public consultation. The four principles are that:

1. Consultations must occur while proposals are still at a formative stage.
2. Sufficient reasons and information must be provided to enable stakeholders to provide an informed response (intelligent consideration).
3. Participants must have enough time to consider the proposal and respond.
4. The results of the consultation must be genuinely taken into account, before final decisions are made.

These principles are intended to ensure that public bodies act fairly and that transparency, accessibility, ability to respond and fairness are key facets of any consultation.

The Vale was, therefore, dismayed by the nature of Thames Water’s sole statutory consultation on the White Horse Reservoir. The consultation not only explicitly insisted that the proposal would not be altered (an apparent contravention of the first of the Gunning Principles) but also failed to provide sufficient information to give ‘intelligent consideration’ in multiple areas (a breach of the second of the Gunning Principles). We would, therefore, contend that the consultation was neither meaningful nor valid.

As a consequence, the Vale is requesting that you direct Thames Water to carry out a fresh consultation which considers all the potential options/alternatives in relation to the White Horse Reservoir proposal and provides respondents with all of the relevant information to allow them to make an informed decision.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours Sincerely,



Councillor Bethia Thomas
Leader of the Council

cc Environment Agency Chief executive, OFWAT Interim Chief executive,