

The Rt. Hon. Emma Reynolds M.P.
Secretary of State for Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food & Rural
Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Councillor Bethia Thomas
Leader of the Council

Bethia.Thomas@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

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

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 Ofwat.

We would, firstly, like to reiterate our strong concerns about this scheme. The council believes that it is an ill-conceived, inappropriate and costly project that will fail to address the long-term water needs of the country and that it, therefore, should be cancelled as a matter of course.

In addition to our fundamental issues with the White Horse Reservoir proposal, the Vale would like to highlight our concerns regarding Ofwat's handling of the overall process. According to the Water Industry Act 1991, the regulator is subject to statutory duties which include:

- A duty to protect the interests of consumers.
- A duty to promote economy and efficiency.
- A duty to have regard to sustainable development.

In our opinion, it is questionable whether Ofwat has complied with these statutory duties in relation to the White Horse Reservoir. For example, the council would question whether the interests of consumers are being protected by putting the costs of such a project (which appear to be rising at an exponential rate) onto water bills. (According to the most recent figures the costs of the White Horse Reservoir proposal have increased by 144% in recent years, from around £2.2 billion to an estimated £5.5 to £7.5 billion). We would also note that Ofwat has recently advanced the White Horse Reservoir into Gate 4 of its RAPID scheme despite the project not meeting the regulator's own framework targets.

The Vale would, therefore, like for you as the Secretary of State to provide ministerial assurance that Ofwat's handling of the White Horse Reservoir project complies with its statutory duties under the Water Industry Act 1991. Furthermore, given the material changes to the White Horse Reservoir project since it was assessed and approved, we are also requesting that you ask Thames Water to resubmit their Water Resources Management Plan 2024 to take account of these major modifications/alterations.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours Sincerely,



Councillor Bethia Thomas
Leader of the Council