

Chris Walters
Interim Chief Executive
Ofwat
Centre City Tower
7 Hill Street
Birmingham
B5 4UA

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 Mr Walters

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 the RAPID programme.

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.

The RAPID programme is designed to help accelerate the development of new water infrastructure and water resource solutions. Under the terms of the programme, schemes should demonstrate best value, affordability, efficiency and adaptability – with each scheme being re-appraised at each gate (stage) of the programme where material changes have occurred. The Vale was, therefore, surprised about your decision to progress the White Horse Reservoir project through to Gate 4 of the programme.

In our opinion, there have been fundamental changes to the White Horse Reservoir project, not least in terms of cost, which demand the need for a reappraisal of the whole scheme. Consequently, the Vale are requesting that Ofwat holds the White Horse Reservoir at Gate 3 of the RAPID programme (and pauses any further RAPID development funding allowance) until a transparent, updated comparative assessment has been published which re-ranks the scheme against other reasonable alternatives using current cost data. We would argue that failing to do so risks undermining public confidence in the RAPID programme and Ofwat.

Moreover, the council would also request that Ofwat publishes an updated affordability and customer bill impact assessment for the White Horse Reservoir project that reflects the full scale of the cost escalations of the scheme. This will help

to provide transparency for residents, consumers and decision-makers, thereby, allowing for a fair and accurate evaluation to be made regarding the future of the proposal.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours Sincerely,



Councillor Bethia Thomas
Leader of the Council