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Via email

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7 September 2026

Dear Mr Weston,

I am writing on behalf of Vale of White Horse District Council in relation to the White Horse Reservoir and Thames Water's recent press release promoting the results of your public survey regarding the reservoir.

I believe the press release and resulting headlines significantly overstate and mislead on what the survey actually demonstrates.

My overriding concern is that misunderstanding or misrepresenting the community's responses related to this project and water security projects in general risks Thames Water minimising or overlooking the genuine and legitimate concerns.

In your consultation report, there are several instances where support for water security, infrastructure investment, or a positively-framed description of the reservoir is presented publicly as support for the White Horse Reservoir proposal itself. The distinction matters!

For example, where the press release promotes "89 per cent of people back White Horse Reservoir to secure water supply in the South East". The survey evidence supporting this statement is significantly more nuanced:

- Only 19 per cent of respondents had heard of the reservoir before the survey. Most respondents were therefore forming opinions with little or no prior knowledge.
- The 89 per cent support figure comes after respondents were shown information supplied by Thames Water.
- The information shown appears almost entirely positive, focusing on benefits and including little or no discussion of the negative impacts that exist.
- Several widely quoted figures actually relate to broader propositions (future water security, leisure benefits, environmental benefits) rather than support for the specific reservoir proposal.

In short, I do not think the survey provides strong evidence of overwhelming support for the project that Thames Water claims - in the ordinary meaning most readers would infer from

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the headlines. I would argue the 'evidence' you provide of support for the reservoir only came after respondents were exposed to a one-sided description of its claimed benefits.

The information they were shown was skewed towards economy, jobs and recreation – whilst it didn't address escalating costs exceeding £6.6bn (and Thames Water's financial difficulties), customer bill impacts, carbon impacts, traffic and construction disruption, alternative water supply options – not to mention landscape loss and flooding risks (fluvial and groundwater).

Opinion is highly dependent on how the project is framed. The survey therefore only demonstrates that opinions were highly influenced by the information provided.

Claims overwhelming public support are highly misleading and distressing to the communities we know are in opposition and concerned about this project.

I would like to reiterate that your framing of the survey outcomes gives me significant cause for concern that you are underestimating and failing to recognise many of the very real, legitimate and valid concerns in the community. And if you are failing to recognise the concerns, and suggesting there is widespread support, how can we have confidence that you will address these concerns when realising this project should it get government approval.

You are aware that my council believes that the proposed reservoir is not the right solution to addressing the future water needs of southern England and that we continue to believe you must consider other options.

We will of course continue to do everything in our power to influence and scrutinise the project should it continue to go ahead to ensure the core issues we have raised are addressed, namely emergency planning and security, flood risk, water quality, biodiversity, construction and traffic impacts and employment commitments.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Bethia Thomas
Leader of the Council