



South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) – Responses to commonly asked questions

This note was produced in January 2022, it is based on the technical work completed at the time. It will be updated periodically to take account of new information and additional questions from stakeholders and the local community.

Why did you choose this site?

A site selection study was completed which considered over 50 sites across the Thames basin. The site near Abingdon was identified to be the best location for a large reservoir. It is well placed geographically and in terms of the surrounding topography. Several of the water companies Thames Water, Affinity Water and South East Water, that serve the south east, have existing abstractions on the River Thames and/or infrastructure networks for distributing the water from these abstractions in the area. A regional storage reservoir located close to the River Thames and upstream of these abstractions would provide greatest benefit across the whole region.

The reservoir will be an industrial eyesore in the middle of rural Oxfordshire

There are reservoirs up and down the country that add to local environments and this would be the case for these proposals. We are committed to establishing an Expert Panel to advise on the design of the reservoir and will be consulting extensively with local people and communities as part of the process. Detailed proposals for the appearance of the reservoir will consider the feedback from the local community and other stakeholders if the reservoir is taken forward.

Why does it have to be so big?

The size of the proposed reservoir is to cater for the most severe drought conditions, a facility of this capacity is essential. We know that it will cover a very large area but it does also create additional opportunities for recreation, a real chance to enhance the natural environment and increase access to the outdoor activities for local communities.

You will destroy the local landscape and character of the area and have a catastrophic impact on wildlife

The reservoir will be sensitively designed with careful landscaping to fully integrate it into the wider landscape. The reservoir offers opportunities to create new landscape, support more diverse wildlife habitats than currently exist and provide recreational activities.

How can it enhance the countryside when you are flooding it with water?

Lakes, rivers and reservoirs are all key features of our landscape and environment. We would work with the environmental specialists to design the reservoir to maximise environmental opportunities. This could include enhancing both the landscape and environment by providing new aquatic and terrestrial habitats that encourage greater biodiversity and move away from the predominantly monocultural arable farmland that presently characterises the area.

We would also explore the potential for developing carbon capturing wetlands. Thames Water has a long and successful track record of doing this at the London Wetland Centre working for over 30 years with the Wildfowl & Wetland Trust to create one of the UK's most important wildlife sites and most popular visitor attractions.

The reservoir could also provide environmental benefits beyond the immediate area including helping to protect our sensitive rivers and chalk streams by reducing the amount of water we need to take from them, as well as compensation flows from the reservoir at times of low flow in the Thames to improve the quality of the river ecosystem.

Will there be any benefits for the community?

The reservoir has the potential to offer a wide range of opportunities including creating a place that people will want to visit for their health and wellbeing. It will create new accessible leisure and recreational facilities from walking, cycling, fishing, birdwatching and a wide range of water sports. If

the reservoir is taken forwards, we would work with stakeholders, specialists in creating visitor attractions and the local community to deliver the best project for the local area and wider Oxfordshire.

Will there be any jobs?

There would be significant employment opportunities both directly through construction and for small and medium-sized local businesses joining the supply chain created by the construction. There would also be opportunities for apprenticeships and to work with schools and colleges to champion careers in engineering and construction inspiring a new generation of young people.

Post construction the reservoir could generate sustained regional and local benefits from new job creation, environmental enhancements, new opportunities to enjoy the outdoors as well as boosting tourism in the area.

Alongside this, reliable supplies of water year in year out are vital to supporting businesses, services and local communities.

How long will it take to build and how will you manage traffic?

The construction time is around eight years. In terms of construction impact, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) will be carried out once a more detailed design of the reservoir has been developed. This would assess all the significant environmental impacts of the proposed development and suggest ways to reduce or minimise those impacts, this would include traffic movements.

Will the reservoir increase the risk of flooding in the area?

No, it won't. The reservoir will be built on some of the existing floodplain associated with tributaries of the River Ock and therefore flood compensation measures will be included in the design to leave flood risk at a lower level than if the project hadn't taken place.

In addition, the reservoir could potentially improve flood risk management in the Abingdon area and as part of the Thames Valley flood risk management strategy. Work is ongoing with the Environment Agency on this.

Because of rising and falling water levels, it will not be possible to use the reservoir for leisure purposes and it will be unsafe for walkers and unusable for sailing or fishing

The reservoir will offer considerable potential for recreation, leisure, and education opportunities. It is simply wrong to state it will be unsuitable for recreation or that it is unsafe.

The reservoir will offer a wide range of opportunities including creating a place that people will want to visit for their health and wellbeing, new accessible leisure and recreational facilities from walking, cycling, fishing, birdwatching and a wide range of water sports for all.

There is a huge weight of public opinion against this proposal including at every level of local government in Oxfordshire, why don't you just drop it.

Major infrastructure projects such as the reservoir always attract opposition. It is understandable that those located close to the proposed facilities have some concerns and if the reservoir is promoted we will work with local communities to understand concerns and take measures to mitigate them. On the other hand, a large number of people and organisations across the region see the need for such a facility.

Why don't you just stop the leaks, then we wouldn't need a reservoir?

Leakage is a priority issues and we need to do better when it comes to managing leakage, so we're investing significantly to tackle the amount of water that is lost from our water pipes. But we also need to do more to ensure that future supply meets the demand of a growing population and growing economy. We need people and businesses to change the way they use water and we need to invest to build a modern 21st century infrastructure like the reservoir to manage water better.

The carbon cost of development on this scale will be colossal. We are currently in a climate emergency, how can you justify this?

There will be a carbon cost associated with all new infrastructure development. Should the reservoir proceed to the development stage we would look to use existing low carbon technologies while looking at how emerging technologies and innovation could reduce the carbon budget on the project. We will be working with companies, regulators, and others on how any additional carbon from the regional plan can be managed and, where possible reduced.

The Planning Inspector has already thrown out the reservoir at Public Inquiry, why is it still an option?

This is not the case. In 2010, the reservoir was included in Thames Water's Water Resources Management Plan as part of a range of options to mitigate "long term risk". This recognised the future challenges of climate change and environmental protection. The Planning Inspector did not support planning for 'long term risk' and therefore for any programmes or options which had the objective of meeting 'long term risk'. As the reservoir was part of this package of measures, it was ruled out. This was the basis of the Inspector's conclusions and not a specific rejection of a new reservoir.

END 14 January 2022