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Water.** 

South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO)

Supporting Document G

Stakeholder and Customer Engagement Report

J696-DN-A07X-ZZZZ-RP-EL-100001

Version: 1.0

Standard Gate three submission for SESRO
SRO

Notice – Position Statement

- This document has been produced as the part of the process set out by RAPID for the development of the Strategic Resource Options (SROs). This is a regulatory gated process allowing there to be control and appropriate scrutiny on the activities that are undertaken by the water companies to investigate and develop efficient solutions on behalf of customers to meet future drought resilience challenges.
- This report forms part of the suite of documents that make up the ‘Gate 3 submission.’ Gate 3 of the RAPID programme represents a checkpoint on the way to solutions being prepared for consent applications. The intention at this stage is to provide RAPID with an update on activities being undertaken in preparation for consent application submission; activities’ progress including programme through to completion; and consideration of specific activities to address particular risks or issues associated with a solution. The regulatory gated process does not form part of the consenting process and will not determine whether an SRO is granted planning consent.
- Given the stage of the SROs in the planning process, the information presented in the Gate 3 submission includes material or data which is still in the course of completion, pending further engagement, consultation, design development and technical / environmental assessment. Final proposals will be presented as part of consent applications in due course.
- The project information captured in this document reflects a design freeze in October 2024 following the non-statutory consultation, to meet the requirements of RAPID’s gated process. Since then, the design has continued to evolve which includes further work with Affinity Water and Southern Water partners to form agreed requirements for the development consent application, such as the incorporation of Southern Water’s proposed water treatment works into the SESRO consent. You can find the latest information about the design and development of the project at <https://thames-sro.co.uk/projects/sesro/>.

Disclaimer

This document has been written in line with the requirements of the RAPID Gate 3 Guidance (v3, January 2024) and to comply with the regulatory process pursuant to Thames Water’s, Southern Water’s and Affinity Water’s statutory duties. The information presented relates to material or data which is still in the course of completion. Should the solution presented in this document be taken forward, the co-sponsors will be subject to the statutory duties pursuant to the necessary consenting process, including environmental assessment and consultation as required. This document should be read with those duties in mind.

Revision history

Version	Date	Submitted at
1.0	21-07-2025	RAPID submission

RAPID “Strategic regional water resource solutions guidance for gate three” January 2024

By gate three submission solutions should have completed non-statutory consultation, and be undertaking statutory pre-planning consultation for DCO solutions, or equivalent for local planning. Solution owners should begin engagement with all relevant statutory bodies as early as possible to de-risk solutions and ensure opportunities are not missed: Gate three engagement should include:

Guidance	Source	Sections
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Pre-planning statutory consultation as outlined in as described in The Planning Inspectorate Advice note 11 and Annexes A-H •Plans showing ongoing and continued engagement, that have been shared with public and statutory bodies, including any required enhanced advisory services. 	Final RAPID Gate 3 Guidance, January 2024	Chapters 4 to 7. Note that statutory consultation under the Planning Act 2008 will take place in the Autumn of 2025 once the Preliminary Environmental Information Report is completed. Non-statutory consultation was undertaken in the Summer of 2024.
<p>Gate three engagement should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •customer engagement, particularly on changes of source where relevant. •Engagement with all stakeholders affected by the solution’s development. 	Final RAPID Gate 3 Guidance, January 2024	Chapters 4 to 7
Solution submissions should also describe specifically what stakeholder concerns have been raised in representations to date (including representations on the draft decisions at previous gates) and how they have been addressed at gate three or will be addressed at future gates.	Final RAPID Gate 3 Guidance, January 2024	Appendix 1 and Appendix 2

<p>Under the Water Industry Act 1991, water suppliers have a statutory duty to supply water used for domestic purposes, including drinking, cooking, food preparation and washing, that is wholesome. Wholesomeness is defined in regulation 4 as water that does not contain concentrations or values of the parameters listed in Schedule 1 of the Regulations that exceed or otherwise do not meet the prescribed concentration or value. Water must also not contain any microorganism, parasite or substance at a concentration that is a potential danger to human health. Changes to a potable water source can lead to changes in the water chemistry impacting on the taste, odour, colour or feel of water supplied to customers, leading to complaints to water companies and/or regulators, customer anxiety and a lack of trust in the company. Concerns can be allayed by water companies engaging with stakeholders and customers at an early stage, before any changes are made to their supply. This engagement should highlight any potential changes to their supply, clearly explain why this is happening and whether this will be a permanent, intermittent, or temporary change.</p>	<p>Final RAPID Gate 3 Guidance, January 2024</p>	<p>N/A. In light of the conclusions of the previous customer research for Gate 2, the short timescales preferred to communicate water source changes to customers and the lack of source changes resulting directly from the SESRO scheme, no further customer engagement on drinking water quality has been undertaken for Gate 3.</p>
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Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

Term	Explanation
Scheme Partners	Affinity Water, Southern Water and Thames Water
ACWG	All Company Working Group
ADC	Auxiliary Drawdown Channel
AFW	Affinity Water
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BBOWT	Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust
BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain
CCT	Clay Compaction Trial
CCW	Consumer Council for Water
CPO	Compulsory Purchase Order
DCO	Development Consent Order
DNO	Distribution Network Operator
DPC	Direct Procurement for Customers
DWI	Drinking Water Inspectorate
DWSP	Drinking Water Safety Plan
EA	Environment Agency
ECI	Early Contractor Involvement
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ES	Environmental Statement
GARD	Group Against Reservoir Development
GCN	Great Crested Newts
FRA	Flood Risk Assessment
HE	Historic England
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
IP	Infrastructure Provider
IPA	Infrastructure and Projects Authority
LVIA	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
MI/d	Mega (million) Litres Per Day
NAU	Environment Agency, National Appraisal Unit
NE	Natural England
NPS	National Policy Statement (on Water Resources)
OCC	Oxfordshire County Council
Ofwat	Water Services Regulation Authority
OxLEP	Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership
PA2008	Planning Act, 2008
PEIR	Preliminary Environmental Information Report
PINS	Planning Inspectorate
PPA	Planning Performance Agreement
PMB	Programme Management Board
PRoW	Public Rights of Way

Term	Explanation
RAPID	Regulators Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development
SESRO	South East Strategic Reservoir Option
SO	South Oxfordshire
SoCC	Statement of Community Consultation
SODC	South Oxfordshire District Council
SoR	Statement of Response
SoS	Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
SRO	Strategic Resource Option
STT	Severn to Thames Transfer
SW	Southern Water
T2AT	Thames to Affinity Transfer
T2ST	Thames to Southern Transfer
TLG	Technical Liaison Group
TW	Thames Water
VofWH DC	Vale of White Horse District Council
WBCT	Wilts and Berks Canal Trust
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WRMP	Water Resources Management Plan
WRSE	Water Resources South East
WTW	Water Treatment Works

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Executive summary

Introduction

This document is the annex to Section 9 of the Gate 3 submission for the SESRO Strategic Resource Option (SRO) and provides detailed information on the engagement undertaken with local communities and stakeholders on SESRO.

It includes an overview of the engagement activity, the main points of feedback from local communities and stakeholders and how they have been considered in the ongoing programme of work and development of SESRO.

Our engagement activity through Gate 3 built on previous engagement, taking account of issues and concerns raised by local communities and stakeholders, and was designed to give stakeholders the opportunity to comment at a formative stage, whilst engaging opening and transparently.

We developed our approach to engagement in line with RAPID's guidance for Gate 3¹. We have built on the foundation of stakeholder and customer feedback received prior to Gate 2, activity completed through Gate 2, the representations made to RAPID on the Gate 2 submission and direct feedback from RAPID and other regulators.

We recognise the importance of managing the 'journey' for all who will be affected by the construction and operation of SESRO. The approach is based on principles of clarity and transparency, inclusiveness, and responsiveness to people's views.

The Development Consent Order (DCO) process has a number of stages where those affected by a project can participate in consultation events, receive information and make representations. Through our stakeholder engagement strategy we are providing a structured approach including additional non-statutory pre-application information and engagement events and providing information about the programme and next steps that people can anticipate.

WRMP and Regional Plans

Engagement and consultation with stakeholders has been integral through the development of the Water Resource Management Plans (WRMPs) and regional water resources plans, as these plans set the needs case for water resource schemes, including SESRO. The engagement involved a wide range of water users – customers,

¹ Strategic regional water resource solutions guidance for gate two.

businesses, other sectors and stakeholders – with the objective to understand their priorities and preferences, and to take these into account in decisions leading to the submission of the Water Resources South East regional plan and company WRMPs.

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement and feedback has informed and continues to influence the SESRO design and legacy benefit goals, which is a key part of planning and the DCO application process. It lays the groundwork for fulfilling the further prescribed stages of statutory consultation during 2025 and to enable the Planning Inspectorate to be assured, in due course, of the adequacy of consultation, which forms part of pre-acceptance checks for the DCO application.

We have developed a multi-strand programme of engagement to ensure we engage with all parties who are interested in the project comprising engagement with local people; land and property owners; local organisations; parish, district and county councils; regulators and technical stakeholders.

We are also providing a regular stream of external public communications highlighting important steps in the SESRO programme and providing an update on a particular SESRO topic of interest, for example, on the WRMP approval, ground investigations, clay compaction trial, and archaeological surveys.

We have shared information, for example, our initial masterplan and optioneering work, with technical stakeholders, providing regular updates on the programme of work and the studies underway and giving opportunity for comment and feedback.

We have worked with regulators and stakeholders as part of Technical Liaison Groups to jointly define the scope of work and technical methods and to provide the outputs for technical assessments for review and challenge at an early stage of work.

We have engaged with stakeholder organisations, who have specialist technical knowledge or a specific interest, to share relevant information and provide opportunities to input to the work.

Across the stakeholder groups there is awareness of the scheme both locally and regionally. There are local concerns, particularly in relation to reservoir safety, flood risk and construction impacts. There is also support recognising the potential environmental, social and economic opportunities the reservoir could bring.

We have taken feedback on board in developing our designs and engaging with stakeholders. For example, by undertaking a project level landscape character

assessment which has informed our project landscape led design principles and Interim Master Plan.

Stakeholders have fed back that they would like a range of visuals and schematics to aid their understanding of the project, so we have produced videos, animations and Virtual Reality (VR) visuals in response. We have also produced a series of factsheets on topics ranging from flood risk to the DCO process to support improving community understanding of technical issues and processes.

Wider benefits and customer engagement

Wider benefits for SESRO are being developed in collaboration with local stakeholders and communities to ensure they are relevant and appropriate. We are forging partnerships with a range of organisations, such as conservation groups, educational institutions, and community groups and by leveraging their expertise, resources and networks we can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the lasting legacy benefits that SESRO can provide.

Engagement to date includes topic-based workshops with local stakeholder and community organisations; in depth discussions on topic specific issues; and community research with local communities and across the wider South East region. As part of the non-statutory public consultation, we led specific engagement briefings on legacy opportunities, and the Interim Master Plan was an integral part of the consultation.

In respect of customer research, we commissioned a survey, with over 1,000 participants who are representative of local residents² and the wider South East of England³, to understand the level of support for the reservoir, preferences on aspects of the design, and what additional activities and features they would value and use as part of the proposed reservoir. The results of the research provided helpful insight on awareness and knowledge of the project as well as preferences for opportunities at the site.

Next steps

As we progress the project forward to a DCO submission in 2026 we will continue with our technical liaison meetings with stakeholders, one to one landowner engagement, community briefings and public information campaigns.

Ahead of the DCO submission, there will also be three key engagement and consultation stages; these being our summer SESRO public information campaign, the publication of

² Local residents were included based on a 20km radius from the project, based on data from the Open Geography Portal by the Office for National Statistics.

³ Office for National Statistics 2021 Census data was used to ensure survey participants were representative of the South East of England

our Statement of Community Consultation in the summer of 2025, and our Autumn 2025 statutory consultation.

Concluding points

In summary we have in place a dedicated engagement team in place with an extensive, well-structured engagement programme. The programme operates at many levels - 1-1 conversations, talks, presentations through to consultation events; we are listening and responding to feedback. As set out in our community research, although the voices we hear loudest oppose the scheme, they do not represent the overall community. We continue to work with those in opposition to address concerns, but we will also ensure we develop a scheme which not only delivers water for customers and a range of wider opportunities.

1. Introduction and context

1.1 Introduction

Under the Water Industry Act 1991, every water company must prepare and maintain a Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP). This plan is updated every five years and sets out how companies are required to produce WRMPs every five years. The water-stressed status of south-east England was recognised by Ofwat (the Water Services Regulation Authority) following submission of the WRMP 2019 (Various Water Companies, 2019), and subsequently, funding was provided for water companies to investigate, then develop SROs that will benefit customers and the wider society and help protect and enhance the environment. Thames Water's WRMP 2024 was published on 18 October 2024, following a direction to publish from the Secretary of State in August 2024. The WRMP24 aligns with the revised draft Water Resources South East (WRSE) regional plan and establishes the need for a new 150Mm³ reservoir (the South East Strategic Reservoir Option, or SESRO) that will primarily supply Thames Water, Southern Water and Affinity Water customers.

1.2 SESRO

In 2019, Ofwat provided funding for water companies to investigate and develop new large scale Strategic Resource Options (SROs) which are expected to play a crucial role in meeting long-term water needs, particularly in the South East which is described as "seriously water stressed". SESRO is a strategically important SRO which requires development by multiple partners for wider regional benefit beyond one company's supply boundaries. This type of scheme is lengthy and complex to consent and develop. In accordance with Thames Water's WRMP, SESRO is required to be operational by 2040.

1.3 RAPID

RAPID, a joint team made up of the three water regulators: Ofwat, the Environment Agency (EA) and the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI), was set up to support and oversee the progress of SROs. At PR19, Ofwat introduced a new gated process for which RAPID provides advisory oversight. At each gate, RAPID assesses the progress made in the development of each solution and provides recommendations to Ofwat on whether to release the next tranche of funding to continue scheme development. This process allows comparison of the solutions at regular intervals, and has clear checkpoints, or 'gates', to assess progress and determine which solutions should be taken forward for further work.

Each scheme passes through a series of governance 'gates', enabling key information to be presented and an assessment made on whether the scheme should continue for further development. The gates, for a standard SRO, set out by Ofwat in PR19 are as follows:

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- Gate 1 – Initial feasibility, design and multi-solution decision making.
- Gate 2 – Detailed feasibility, design and multi-solution decision making.
- Gate 3 – Finalised feasibility, pre-planning investigations and planning applications
- Gate 4 – Planning application, procurement strategy and land purchase.

1.4 Structure of Report

This report has been prepared to provide technical supporting information for the SESRO SRO Gate three submission to RAPID. This report is Annex 9, Supporting Document G, Stakeholder and Customer Engagement Strategy. An overview of the SESRO project is provided in the gate three main report to RAPID (primarily, in section 2).

The structure of this supporting document is as follows:

- Chapter 2 provides background to our previous engagement on SESRO
- Chapter 3 sets out our updated SESRO engagement strategy
- Chapter 4 summarises our stakeholder engagement undertaken in Gate 3
- Chapter 5 covers our wider benefits and customer engagement
- Chapter 6 explains our summer 2024 non-statutory consultation
- Chapter 7 sets out the next steps.

2. Background

2.1 Introduction

A new reservoir in Oxfordshire has been considered for more than three decades. During this period there has been extensive engagement with national and regional stakeholders, local communities, and with customers. There is general awareness of the project, an understanding of the main issues of concern, and also support recognising the need for new water sources as well as the potential environmental, social and economic opportunities the reservoir could bring to the local area and the South East region.

2.2 Summary of activity during Gate 2

The stakeholder engagement activity undertaken through Gate 2 was two-fold:

- activity to inform the drafting of the WRSE regional plan and water company draft WRMPs, to ensure stakeholders understand how SESRO, and other solutions, fit within the strategic water resource planning framework.
- SESRO specific discussions focused on legal, regulatory and strategic issues which could prevent the scheme progressing or substantially change the design of the scheme. The engagement was with regulators, strategic stakeholders and technical stakeholders. This approach facilitated agreement on the scope of the technical studies and methodological approaches.

The Gate 2 submission to RAPID presented the approach and work completed and was reflected in the good feedback presented in RAPID's final decision on the Gate 2 submission⁴ published in June 2023, alongside the draft decisions for the other standard SROs. The draft decision determined that good progress had been made on all the assessment areas.

RAPID's final Gate 2 decision on SESRO had seven actions and nine recommendations⁵. From a stakeholder engagement perspective these included:

- Continuing local and customer engagement
- Working with the EA flood risk team on refining and developing the flood risk modelling

⁴ RAPID, Standard gate on final decision for SESRO, September 2023

⁵ RAPID, Standard gate on draft decision for SESRO, September 2021, Appendix Actions and Recommendations

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- Reviewing and updating the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment methodology with Natural England
- Engaging with Historic England.

2.3 Moving into Gate 3

We reviewed, and took account of, the feedback received from regulators, stakeholders and the local community, to ensure we had a robust understanding of issues and concerns, as well as opportunities. This information informed the work programme and the engagement through Gate 3.

3. SESRO engagement strategy

3.1 Overview of engagement undertaken

Our engagement activity through Gate 3 built on previous engagement, taking account of issues and concerns raised by local communities and stakeholders.

Our strategic approach sought to:

- Create and share accessible, high-quality project information
- Design engagement plans to align with project milestones
- Clearly explain all facets of the project including the potential environmental, social and economic opportunities
- Raise awareness of the project within the local communities.

3.2 Stakeholder groups

As we developed our engagement strategy we categorised stakeholders into the following groups.



Figure 1. SESRO stakeholder groups.

3.3 SESRO engagement approach

The engagement approach through Gate 3 comprised:

- Statutory public consultation on the draft WRMP, response to representations, further engagement with Defra and approval of the WRMP24
- Engagement with local communities including Parishes, local authorities, local organisations on a range of topics, including on scheme need, surveys and investigations and design

Gate 3 Stakeholder and Customer Engagement Report

- Engagement with regulators and stakeholders on technical aspects of the scheme to inform the feasibility assessments and conceptual design of the scheme
- Engagement with stakeholders on the potential opportunities for the environment, people and the economy from the investment in the proposed reservoir
- Non-statutory public consultation on the interim masterplan and infrastructure options
- Research with customers
- Preparatory activities for Development Consent Order application.

4. Stakeholder engagement through Gate 3

4.1 Introduction

Our engagement on the project comprises comprehensive engagement and consultation with stakeholders including regulators, local authorities, landowners, utilities, local groups, and the wider community as referenced in Figure 1.

4.2 Stakeholder groups

We set out below our approach to engagement with each of the stakeholder groups.

- **Regulators**

Quarterly update meetings, site visits and working groups have been held with RAPID to discuss the SESRO programme, outputs, risks and issues. Ongoing wider engagement with Defra, EA and Ofwat on WRMP and the SROs.

- **Technical**

Technical engagement has been undertaken on specific topics, e.g. through Technical Liaison Groups (TLGs). These technical meetings were set up in Gate 2 and expanded in Gate 3. The purpose of the technical meetings is to enable collaborative working with stakeholders who had specialist knowledge or a defined stake in the topic.

A list of TLGs and the organisations that attend the meetings are listed in Table 1 below, with more detailed information on each Group including the scope of discussions and feedback themes presented in Appendix 1.

TLG / technical meeting	Members / invitees
Flood risk	EA, OCC & VoWH DC
Access and recreation	EA, NE, OCC & VoWH DC
Rail	Network Rail, OCC & VoWH DC
Aquatic environment	EA
Water quality (river and drinking water)	DWI, NAU, EA local Teams, DWI
Terrestrial environment	EA
Water Resources Modelling & Licensing	NAU, EA local Teams, OCC
Planning	OCC & VoWH DC
Canal route safeguarding	Wilts and Berks Canal Trust, VoWH DC

Emergency planning	Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum
Landscape & visual	OCC, SO and VoWH DCs, North Wessex Downs National Landscape, NE, EA
Historic Environment	OCC, VoWH DC and Historic England

Table 1. List of TLGs and which stakeholders attend.

Discussions up to March 2024 focused on design aspects and progress updates, with particular emphasis on landscape led design. Such discussions were generally held on a quarterly basis with additional meetings arranged to discuss specific issues, where appropriate.

From March 2024 the attention of the technical meetings focused on EIA Scoping and baseline surveys and new TLGs were set up to encompass further EIA topics. Additional organisations were also added to the existing TLGs, where appropriate. During the meetings presentations on the proposed EIA methods and scope were presented, and where appropriate, further information given.

Planning Inspectorate: Our planning specialists lead regular meetings with the Planning Inspectorate. A Project Inception Meeting was held with the Planning Inspectorate in October 2023, establishing the formal commencement of the pre-application DCO process. We have engaged with the Planning Inspectorate to agree a proportionate level of service provision for the project as it moves forwards through the pre-application stage, this being pre-application Service Tier 2 (Standard). This will facilitate the appropriate level of pre-application engagement, support and advice from the Planning Inspectorate, including with respect to facilitating discussion and consensus-building between the applicant and statutory consultees concerning key examination issues and potential areas of disagreement. Further project update meetings were held with the project case management team in December 2023 and August 2024; and a request for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping opinion was made to the Planning Inspectorate at the end of August 2024. A scoping opinion was received on 8 October 2024.

Utilities. SESRO requires the diversion or protection of various existing utilities to enable construction works. These include water, wastewater, gas electricity and telecommunications infrastructure, assets and networks. There are also new utility service requirements to facilitate the construction, commissioning and operation phases of SESRO and any other SRO project elements included within the SESRO DCO application. We have initiated discussions with utilities, such as SSE.

- **Water companies: Southern Water and Affinity Water**

We have established a strong working relationship between Thames Water, Southern Water and Affinity Water covering commercial, engagement and technical matters, with coordination and review at a project board level, as shown in Figure 2 below.

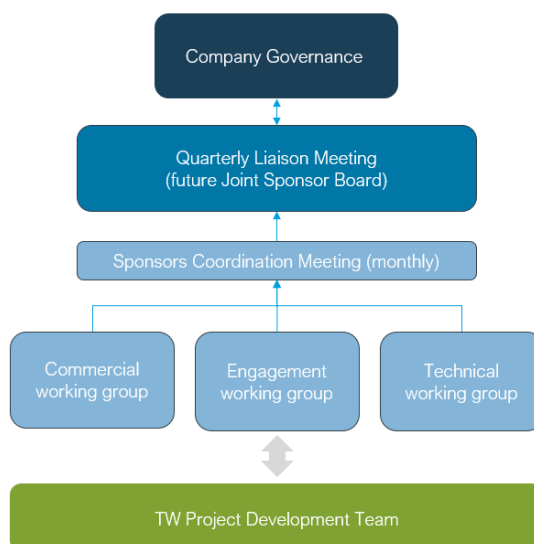


Figure 2. SESRO partnership working between Thames Water, Southern Water and Affinity Water

We have worked closely with joint staffing of WRMP and SESRO engagement and consultation events by Thames Water, Affinity Water and Southern Water to ensure that information about the Severn Thames Transfer (STT), Thames to Southern Transfer (T2ST) and the Thames to Affinity Transfer (T2AT) and their interactions with SESRO is available.

We have also undertaken joint working with Southern Water to consider the location, design and consenting of T2ST infrastructure on the SESRO site and the sequence and programming of consultation relating to that infrastructure. Engagement with Southern Water has assisted in clarifying the need and location within the SESRO site for a T2ST pumping station and water treatment works and the expected location of the T2ST pipeline corridor at its northern (SESRO-facing) end and considering consenting responsibilities relating to such infrastructure.

- **Local authorities**

We hold monthly briefings with senior officers from the Vale of White Horse District Council (who also represent South Oxfordshire District Council) and Oxfordshire County Council. These include meetings focused solely on SESRO but also meetings at a strategic level, focused on wider Thames Water strategic and operational matters such as flooding and demand management.

Regular technical officer meetings, are held, including ongoing engagement with the OCC Archaeologist on the historic environment, specifically the specialist assessments and geophysical and archaeological surveys, as well as the need for early engagement with geoarchaeological team as part of the preliminary geotechnical ground investigations. Local authority officers also attend and participate in Technical Liaison Group meetings.

Councillors of the local authorities (Oxfordshire County Council, Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Councils) are being updated in key development points of the SESRO project via email and provided copies of our quarterly newsletter. Topic briefings for councillors have also been run on reservoir design (July 2023), flood risk (February 2024) and EIA scoping (November 2024). These have been led by our technical specialists, with the opportunity for councillors to ask questions and provide feedback where appropriate. We are committed to work openly and share information at timely intervals and have asked Councillors and officers to feedback on the nature and timings of briefings and we have accommodated all requests. Future briefings are being planned leading up to statutory consultation in Autumn 2025.

- **Town and Parish Councils**

We have offered and provided briefings to Parish Councils at regular points of the SESRO programme through Gate 3. These briefings being for councillors and for the public. We have also specifically engaged with the Parish Councils in relation to the Clay Compaction Trial (CCT) and to seek their feedback on opportunities for long term benefits for communities and the environment through the investment. This approach will continue through statutory consultation, DCO submission and beyond. We responded to feedback that we were not providing regular project updates for local communities and now provide monthly updates to the Parish newsletters and produce a quarterly newsletter which is distributed to local community hubs and published online on website.

Individual Parish briefings	Briefing date
Drayton	February 2023
Marcham	July 2023
East and West Hanneys	July 2023
Hendreds	October 2023
Culham	June 2024
Abingdon	July 2024
Steventon	October 2024
Sutton Courtenay	November 2024
Marcham	November 2024
Wantage	January 2025
Ardington	January 2025

Table 2. List of Parish briefings

- **Interest groups and user groups**

We held a series of workshops with interest groups and user groups leading up to our non-statutory consultation in the summer of 2024. The feedback from these workshops fed into our design development. We will be running a series of workshops and one to one workshops leading to our statutory consultation in Autumn 2025. Further detail on this engagement can be found in section 6.

We also continue to attend and provide project updates to local interest and community group meetings, including Ock Catchment Partnership and local flood groups.

- **Campaign groups**

GARD (Group Against Reservoir Development) has attended our public information events held in 2023 and 2024 where alongside viewing the event material, they were able to have detailed conversations with the multi-disciplinary project team including technical specialists. GARD representatives have also attended technical presentations given to the Local Authorities and Parish Councils.

We have responded to requests for information from GARD in a timely manner.

At the request of GARD we convened a technical meeting with GARD and their consultants on reservoir design and safety on 1 October 2024. This was an opportunity for our reservoir engineers to respond to issues raised by Professor Chris Binnie's report, commissioned by GARD.

We will continue to engage with GARD and other campaign groups through written responses, briefings and public information events.

- **Landowners**

For residents, business owners and those with land interests potentially directly affected by land acquisition for SESRO, early engagement and a consistent, supportive journey are particularly important. Our approach to this is described in Supporting Document E2, the Land Strategy. We need to access land to carry out surveys and acquire land to build and operate the reservoir and associated infrastructure.

Acquisition of land and land rights by agreement is preferred where possible, but it is expected that the SESRO DCO application will seek compulsory acquisition powers.

Landowners across the SESRO site have been identified, written to, and offered individual meetings at key stages of the project, including for survey access, ahead of our public information events and non-statutory consultation.

To support our discussions, we have produced a land and property owners factsheet⁶, which is hosted on our project website, explaining the land survey and land acquisition process.

Early and bespoke engagement with land interests facilitates agreement, where possible, and enables progress in the prescribed steps for compulsory acquisition to deliver the planning and land strategies.

4.3 Engaging with the community

We have provided regular updates to the local community on SESRO, including on the Clay Compaction Trial (CCT) (See Figure 3 below) and ground investigation works.

Thames Water begins clay compaction trial works for Oxfordshire reservoir

Thursday 1 August 2024 10:30



- Thames Water's six-month clay discovery trial gets underway today at the proposed Oxfordshire reservoir site.
- The results will play a crucial role in informing future designs for the new reservoir, including a potential 10km of new embankments.
- The reservoir is a nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) that will help mitigate against the effects of climate change and a growing population, supplying water to 15 million customers across the South East.

Thames Water begins a six-month trial today (Thursday 1 August 2024) to test the clay conditions on land south of Hanney Road, at Cow Common, where a vital new reservoir is proposed to be built.

Figure 3. Thames Water news article on clay compaction trial start

⁶ <https://dn9cxogfaqr3n.cloudfront.net/2024/factsheets/SESRO+-+Land+and+Property+Factsheet.pdf> Land and property factsheet

Our channels of engagement with the community have been through websites, newsletters (see Figure 4 below) and emails, and at public meetings held at Parish council level.

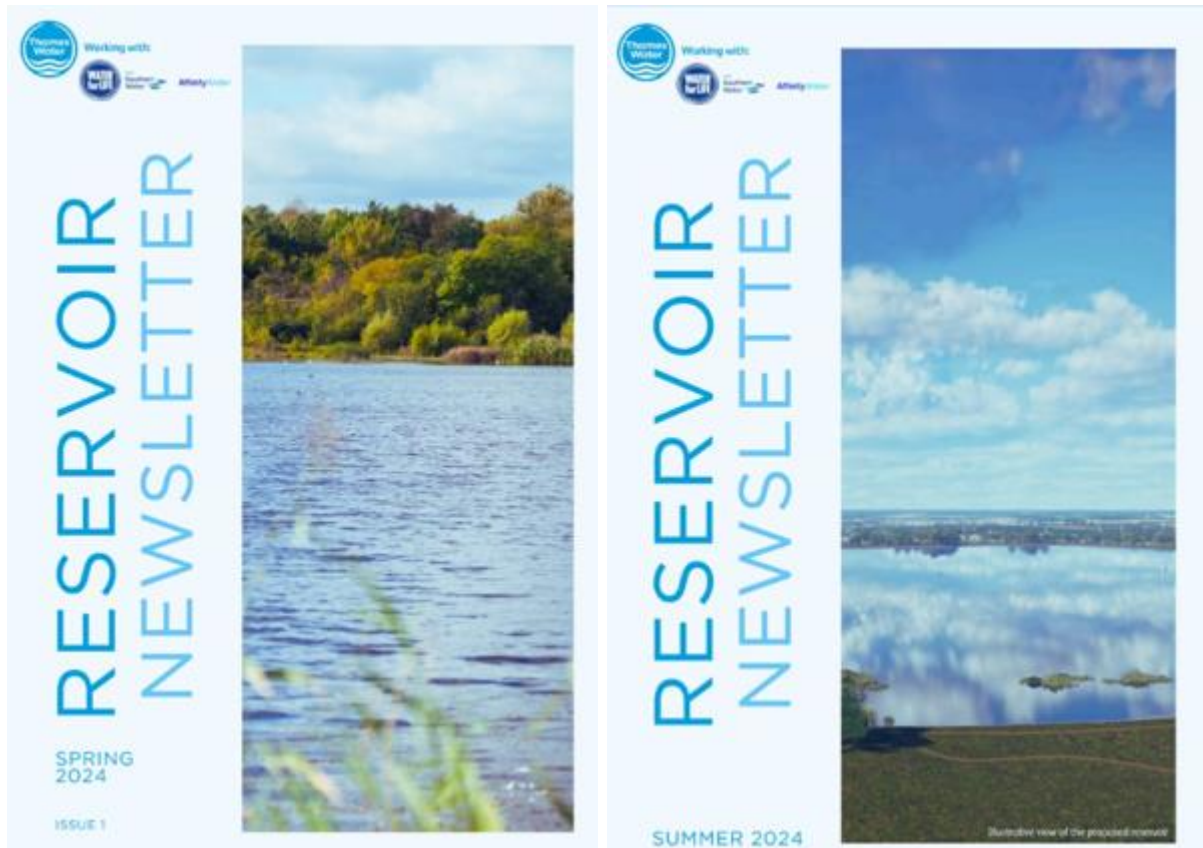


Figure 4. SESRO newsletters

Political representatives

There are five Members of Parliament whose constituencies lie within, or are in close proximity to the SESRO site. We have provided each of their constituency offices with regular updates on SESRO during the course via email, proactive offer of briefings and invitations to our public events. Feedback from local MPs has covered a range of topics, including the needs case of SESRO, reservoir safety, flood risk and consideration of local amenity impacts.

Local Businesses

If approved, SESRO would provide significant economic value locally and regionally. We are building awareness and engagement with the business community, for example through engaging with Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (See Figure 5 below) and Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) to ensure businesses are aware of the project and its potential benefits to them (e.g. through design, construction and operation).

We are also engaging with organisations who are focused on providing skills, training and apprenticeships opportunities and are keen to collaborate, building on their existing programmes to offer opportunities as part of the project.



Figure 5. Presenting an update on SESRO to the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce

Young people

The project will be operational in 2040 and serve communities for the next 150 years. It is particularly important that we hear the priorities and preferences of young people and to address this we are developing a multi-strand programme to foster interest in the project and engage through formal education channels – schools, colleges and universities, as well as informal channels. This work is alongside using innovative aspects for engagement and consultation, for example using virtual reality to show views of the reservoir.

5. Engaging on potential benefits

5.1 Introduction

The primary purpose of SESRO is to ensure we can provide a secure water supply for future generations, but the investment in new water infrastructure provides the opportunity to create additional public value. This additional value includes:

- enhancing the environment by creating new wetlands and habitats, providing a home for wildlife
- providing access to new green spaces for everyone to enjoy, with trails for walkers, wheelers, cyclists and horse riders
- promoting health and wellbeing, with opportunities for a range of water sports and recreational activities
- creating new jobs and apprenticeships for local people and opportunities for local businesses
- providing an attractive destination for visitors and tourists, with benefits for the local economy

These additional values that SESRO can bring align with Ofwat's Public Value Principles, published in March 2022 ([Ofwats-Final-Public-Value-Principles.pdf](#)).

We have initiated conversations with national, regional and local stakeholders to discuss the project and opportunities for environmental, social and economic value. In these discussions, as well as showcasing the opportunities that could be realised from the investment in SESRO, we have been keen to understand the strategic priorities and objectives of these organisations to identify opportunities for collaboration and partnership to achieve the best outcomes.

5.2 Legacy opportunity workshops with interest groups

During February 2024, the project team held several workshops with interest groups to share the initial SESRO Master Plan and listen to feedback on the opportunities and constraints that should be considered. The workshops were topic-based focused on the environment; land-based recreation and water-based recreation. The workshops presented a long list of potential opportunities for consideration as part of the ongoing design and development of the Master Plan.

The discussions covered a range of legacy topics, which included:

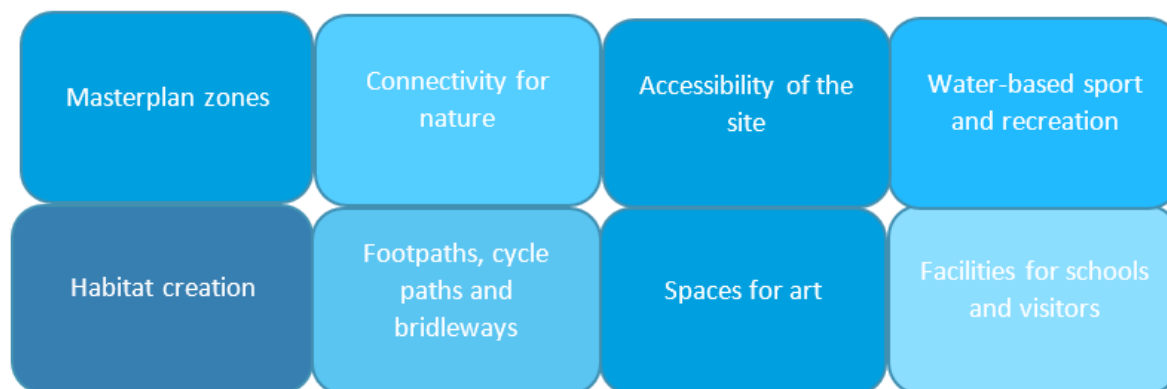


Figure 6. Legacy discussions topics.

Notes of each of the workshops were shared with attendees and a summary of the feedback was reported in our legacy brochure⁷ which was presented in our summer 2024 non-statutory consultation as shown in Figure 7 below.

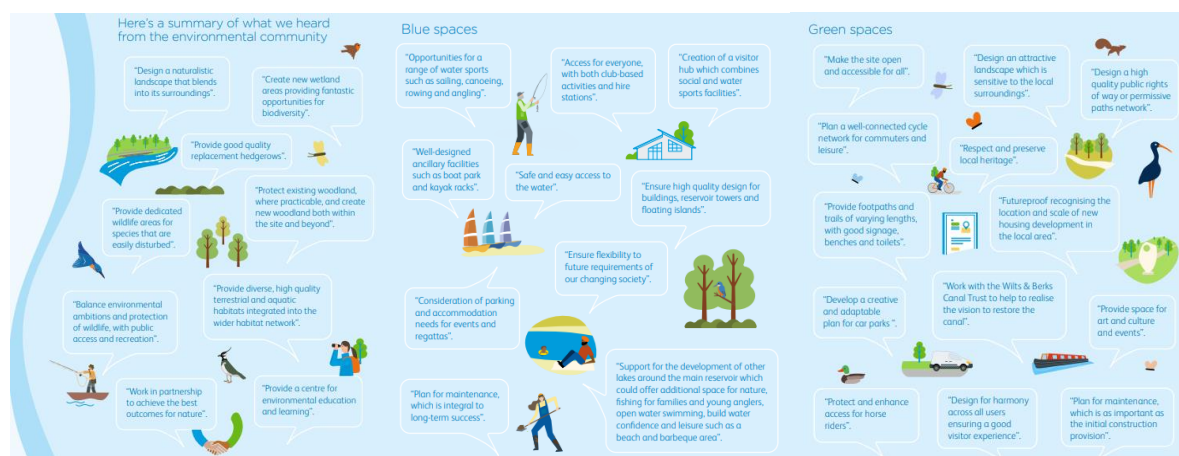


Figure 7. Legacy workshop feedback shown in our summer 2024 legacy brochure.

The workshops presented a long list of potential opportunities for consideration as part of the ongoing design and development of the Master Plan.

We held a further workshop with local stakeholder organisations in July 2024, during the non-statutory public consultation, to share an update on the Master Plan, alongside the Design Vision and proposed Design Principles. The purpose of this workshop was to give stakeholders the opportunity to engage with the project team, gather further information to inform their representation to the non-statutory consultation, and engage in on-going dialogue.

We are continuing to engage with organisations on a one to one basis to seek feedback on technical legacy aspects of the project and also on long-term aspirations for

⁷ SESRO Legacy Brochure, July 2024

<https://dn9cxogfaqr3n.cloudfront.net/2024/Creating+a+lasting+legacy+brochure.pdf>

partnership and collaborative working. This includes with environmental groups; for example the Ock Catchment Partnership; business groups, for example OxLEP and educational institutions, for example Abingdon and Witney college.

5.3 Workshop on opportunities with local Parish Councils

In March 2024 we held a workshop to share the initial Master Plan and hear feedback from local Parishes on the opportunities and constraints. We invited 19 Parish Councils to the workshop, those being the Parish Councils located within 5km of the boundary of the reservoir. Representatives from East and West Hanney, Steventon, Marcham and East Hendred joined the workshop. This workshop aimed to bring together voices and focus on opportunities and constraints. This was in addition to regular engagement with Parish councils reported in Section 5. Table 3 summarises the main issues raised and our responses to the points.

Feedback from representatives of parish councils	Our response
Would the reservoir increase local flooding? The local area already suffers from flooding.	We're undertaking detailed modelling to look at potential flood risk and how we can ensure the risk isn't increased as a result of the proposed new reservoir. We're also scoping opportunities for reducing local flood risk.
The local communities could suffer nuisance during the construction, with particular concern about the pressure on the local road network and traffic congestion.	A Code of Construction Practice would be developed and submitted alongside an application for development consent. This would set out in detail the standards and controls that the contractors must adopt to manage the potential impacts of the works.
Concern that public access to the reservoir site would be limited.	There would be public access to the site with footpaths, cycle paths and bridleways, and the ambition is to facilitate a range of sports and leisure facilities at the site. On-site operational facilities and buildings would need to be secure.
Could the reservoir embankments be lower? Concerns that the embankments would not fit with the local setting, and potentially visually unattractive.	The height of the reservoirs reflects the amount of water to be stored and the depth of clay. The embankments are being designed to consider community feedback, including gentler slopes and landscaping to integrate the reservoir into the surrounding landscape. Landscape fill will be used to allow for the planting of trees and hedgerows.
Loss of biodiversity and ecology during the construction.	The reservoir provides a fantastic opportunity to enhance the local environment and provide space for nature. The emerging design will include the creation of new wetlands areas, and a diverse range of habitats. Experienced ecologists will carry out the assessments and we will work with local environment and community organisations to develop these plans.
Opportunity to develop a new railway station close to Wantage and Grove.	Our Interim Master Plan includes a temporary railway siding to enable us to transport materials, that aren't readily available on site, by rail. There may be the opportunity to repurpose the temporary siding into a permanent railway station. We will facilitate discussions on this, but it does not form part of the project.

Table 3. Feedback from elected Parish Council members as representatives of the local communities.

5.4 Customer engagement – hearing views locally and regionally

Whilst we have endeavoured to have a wide-reaching engagement plan, we want to hear the views and preferences of the whole population, who are representative of the local community, and the wider region. We therefore commissioned a survey, with over 1,000 participants who are representative of local residents⁸ and the wider South East of England⁹, to understand their preferences on aspects of the design, and what additional activities and features they would value and use as part of the proposed reservoir. This survey has provided some helpful insight on awareness and knowledge of the project as well as preferences for opportunities at the site.

The survey results showed that the majority of people within 5km of the reservoir, and beyond, support the development of the proposed reservoir, as shown in Figure 8

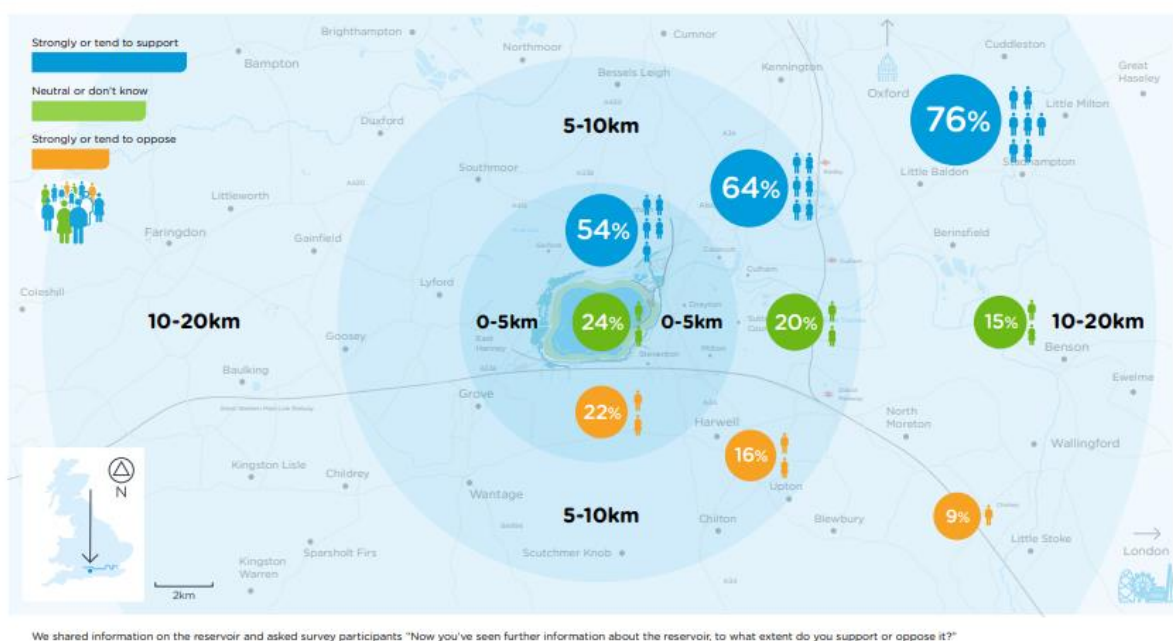


Figure 8. Local and regional support for SESRO

The survey also showed that whilst there was support for all the proposed opportunities at the site, natural trails and access to green spaces were the most appealing, with wildlife/bird watching, walking and running trails for shorter distances (1-5km) and café/restaurant facilities also indicated as important. See Figure 9 below.

⁸ Local residents were included based on a 20km radius from the project, based on data from the Open Geography Portal by the Office for National Statistics.

⁹ Office for National Statistics 2021 Census data was used to ensure survey participants were representative of the South East of England



Figure 9. Legacy preferences

The feedback aligns with some of the strategic priorities published by Oxfordshire County Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council in their long term plans, which set out the importance of improving the local environment and giving access to nature and green spaces, for people's health and wellbeing.

We are taking this feedback into account, alongside feedback received through informal engagement and conversations and from the public consultation in the ongoing design of the project.

5.5 Understanding the potential interest to visiting the reservoir

As presented in the preceding sections, local stakeholder organisations, and the majority of local people, support the creation of a high-quality landscape, with new habitats for nature and wildlife, as well as a new places for people to enjoy, with green and blue spaces and recreation and leisure opportunities. The Design Vision reflects this, and the Interim Master Plan includes provision for a visitor centre, water sports centre, education centre, café and parking, but the scale and size of these facilities has not been decided yet. To validate this feedback, we commissioned a market analysis study to consider the potential market for SESRO, with more robust rationale for visitor numbers, to help inform choices about the scale of the leisure and recreational offering and facilities at the site.

The conclusions of this work highlighted that:

- There would be demand from local existing population centres, such as Oxford, Abingdon and Didcot, for the offerings at SESRO, as well as there being

substantial planned growth in the areas – both in terms of new housing and economic development.

- The local demographic is older and affluent who have time, the means, and appetite for a leisure and recreation offering.
- SESRO could accommodate a large range of activities. The development of a water sports hub with rowing and sailing facilities could be a catalyst to increase reach and visitors.
- Based on the locality, existing local leisure and recreation offerings, forecast local growth, council ambitions for health and well-being and on-site opportunities, a medium to high recreational offering is anticipated, this would equate to an estimate of over 1 million annual visitors for a high recreation offering.

These findings are being reviewed in the context of feedback to the non-statutory consultation and will be explored further as part of the statutory consultation.

5.6 Drinking water quality customer engagement

Customers will be interested in whether their water quality will change, for example in terms of taste and hardness. Drinking water quality customer research was undertaken for Gate 2 across the SROs to gather customer insight on drinking water quality.

In light of the conclusions of the previous customer research for Gate 2, the short timescales preferred to communicate water source changes to customers and the lack of source changes resulting directly from the SESRO scheme, no further customer engagement on drinking water quality has been undertaken for Gate 3.

6. Summer 2024 non-statutory consultation

6.1 Introduction

During summer 2024 we ran a 12-week non-statutory consultation seeking feedback from the community on our interim masterplan and our infrastructure options.

This consultation ran for a period of 12 weeks, opening on 5 June 2024 and closing on 28 August 2024. During this time, we held seven face-to-face events at various locations close to the SESRO site, and we were delighted to welcome 1,276 people who came along, in person, to have their say on our proposals.

We updated our website and widely publicised the consultation process using various media, inviting feedback and responses using our consultation questionnaire. We received over 1,500 consultation responses.



Figure 10. Summary of the SESRO non-statutory consultation

6.2 Consultation topics

We were seeking public feedback on:

- Associated infrastructure options for the reservoir
- Proposed reservoir design principles
- Interim (emerging) reservoir master plan

We also provided a project update, with more detail on topics of interest that the community has raised, including legacy opportunities, and areas of concern, for example on flood risk and embankment design.

6.3 Material

A wide range of material and media was produced and utilised to inform people of our plans. Our SESRO website was updated and refreshed to provide a more user friendly and engaging space for those wishing to find out more about our plans. It explained how to get involved in the consultation events and how to submit consultation feedback including a direct link to our consultation questionnaire. A document library was set up enabling access to online copies of the consultation material and supporting information. Table 4 below lists the documents we published and a summary of their content.

Documents published	Content
Summary brochure	Project overview and update
Technical brochure	Summary of options and Interim Master Plan
Legacy brochure	Overview of plans for potential legacy opportunities available post construction
Options appraisal reports	Covering various methodologies, such as water conveyance, treatment works, access and rail sidings
Interim Master Plan report	Detailed description of what could be included in the reservoir site
Map book	Option appraisal drawings and masterplan zones
Design principles report	Explains the reservoir design visions and different design principles
Factsheets	Covering ground investigations, flood risk, water treatment works, reservoir safety, land & property, EIA (environmental Impact Assessment) and DCO (Development Consent process) and Thames to Southern Transfer

Table 4. Non-statutory consultation and supporting documentation

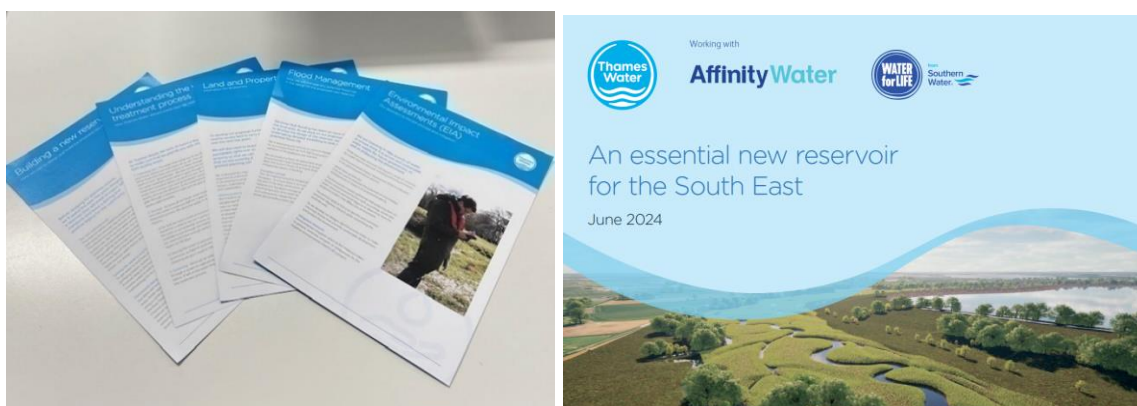


Figure 11. Consultation and support material examples

6.4 Promoting and publicising the consultation.

We carried out a variety of activities to promote and publicise our consultation programme, and encourage different stakeholder groups to find out more about our consultation. Table 5 below lists some of our activities.

Postcard mail drop to 70,000+ addresses in the locality	Letters to landowners
Local and regional press articles	Posters displayed in local areas
Social media releases	Over 100 stakeholders informed via email
School invites to events	Pre-event briefings offered to MPs, council leaders and Parish Councillors
Regional radio coverage	Articles in local Parish newsletters
Regional television coverage	SESRO newsletter

Table 5. Activities to promote and publicise the consultation

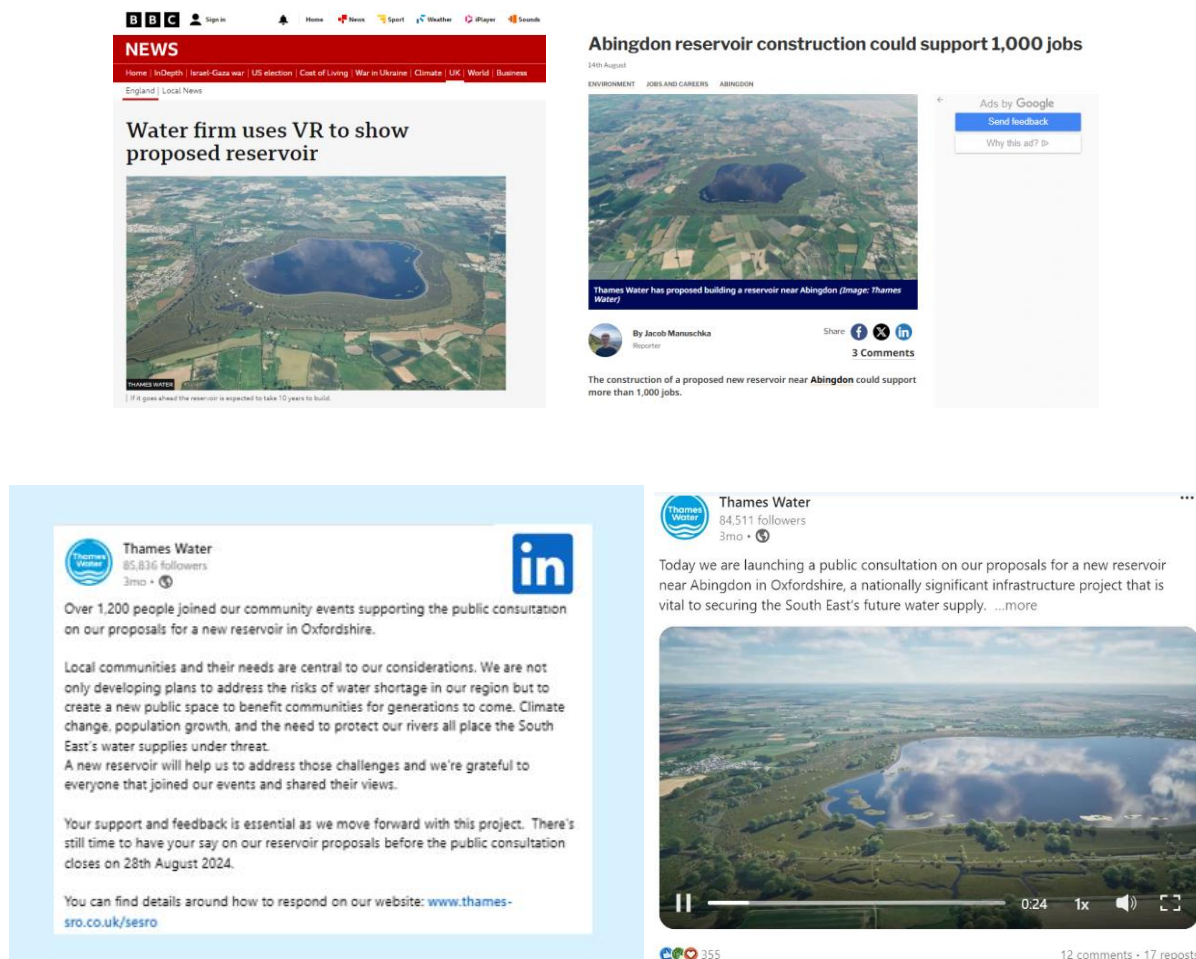


Figure 12. Media articles during consultation

6.5 Consultation events

Seven staffed events were run during the consultation where a dedicated, multi-disciplinary team were in attendance to speak to visitors. A wide range of event materials were available at each venue. This included a large reservoir scale model, a model showing a cross section of the reservoir embankments, Virtual Reality experience using headsets, touch screen construction sequencing video¹⁰, various visualisations and graphics, information boards, maps and written materials including brochures and factsheets. A pre-event briefing for over 30 stakeholders was held prior to the main consultation event in Didcot.



Figure 13. Images from construction sequence



Figure 14. List of the 7 consultation events

¹⁰ [South East Strategic Reservoir Option \(SESRO\) - Construction Animation on Vimeo](#)



Figure 15. VR experience and embankment model

6.6 Who responded to the consultation

The events were well attended with over 1,200 visitors joining us across the 7 events to discuss our Interim Master Plan and provide feedback on our ongoing proposals. Consultation feedback and response questionnaires could be submitted either online, by email or by post. In total we received 1598 consultation responses during the 12-week consultation period.

Stakeholders who responded to consultation included:	
Oxfordshire County Council	Vale of White Horse District Council
Environment Agency	Natural England
Ministry of Defence	Members of Parliament
Local councillors	Rivers and Wildlife Trusts
Parish and Town Councils	Campaign for Protection of Rural England - Oxfordshire
Sport England	Wilts & Berks Canal Trust
Campaign groups, including Group Against Reservoir Development (GARD)	Oxfordshire Architectural and Historic Society
UK Health Security Agency	Southern Gas Networks
Landowners	Land promoters

Table 6. Examples of stakeholders who responded to the consultation

6.7 Analysing the consultation responses

Following the conclusion of this consultation on 28 August 2024, analysis of the responses is being carried out. We will read and consider every response, which are also independently verified by Ipsos. We will provide a formal statement of response to this consultation in summer 2025. Therefore, our report does not include consideration of representations received to the non-statutory public consultation held between June 2024 and August 2024.

Since the summer 2024 consultation we continue to share and use the resources deployed at the consultation events, including the reservoir scale models and VR

headsets. We plan to develop these further along with other immersive engagement tools in our statutory consultation in Autumn 2025.

7. Next steps

7.1 Extending our engagement

We are committed to ongoing and continuous engagement with our stakeholders. As set out in our engagement strategy, as we progress the project forward to a DCO application submission in 2026, we will continue with our technical liaison meetings, workshops, one to one engagement, community research, and high-volume and quality community engagement.

We will continue to build awareness and engagement with the business and education community to ensure businesses, schools, colleges and universities are aware of, and have the opportunity to have a voice in, the project.

It is important we hear the priorities and preferences of seldom heard groups and to address this we will be developing a strategy to foster interest in the project from seldom heard groups.

Ahead of the DCO submission, our three key engagement and consultation stages; these being:

- a SESRO public information campaign in summer 2025, including our Statement of Response to the 2024 consultation;
- engagement with Local Planning Authorities prior to the planned publication of our Statement of Community Consultation in Autumn 2025, and
- our Autumn / Winter 2025 statutory consultation.

7.2. Public information campaign

Following the closure of the non-statutory consultation on 28 August 2024, analysis of the responses is being carried out. We are reading and considering every response and the findings from this feedback were shared with our design team to consider any changes ahead of the design freeze in March 2025. In summer 2025 we are planning to provide a statement of response and explain what changes we are planning to make to the design.

As part of the public information campaign, we will update our website, provide a summary brochure, illustrations and factsheets.

7.3. Statement of Community Consultation

Section 47 of the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008) sets out the duties placed on applicants in respect of consulting the local community. This includes preparing a statement setting out how the applicant proposes to consult, about the proposed application, people living in the vicinity of the land. This is known as a Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC).

We will be preparing the SoCC, drafting the document reflecting on their previous experience of undertaking DCO consultations alongside the feedback and lessons learnt

from the ongoing engagement and previous consultations run for the draft WRMP and SESRO. Before preparing the statement, we will consult each local authority required under the PA2008. A draft schedule of statutory consultees is being prepared.

We will make the statement available for inspection by the public and we will publish in a local newspaper.

7.4. Statutory consultation

The public and stakeholders will be able to provide feedback at our statutory consultation which will be held later in 2025. We will share the details of any changes that may have been made to the Master Plan following the feedback received from local communities, businesses, and other stakeholders.

We will also present in the form of a Preliminary Environment Information Report, the preliminary findings of the EIA being carried out in respect of the project. The statutory consultation will be undertaken in accordance with the Statement of Community Consultation.

Extensive non-statutory consultation has helped to establish effective channels, working groups and local venues for engaging with statutory consultees and the public. Similar to our non-statutory consultation held in the summer of 2024, we will be developing opportunities to demonstrate best practice engagement, including virtual reality, 3D models, animations and other immersive engagement tools.

The SESRO project team is carrying out land referencing and direct contact with land interests to ensure all landowners are identified prior to statutory consultation.

A structured approach has already been used for collecting non-statutory consultation responses, analysing both themes and individual feedback. This will continue to be employed to ensure that regard is had to statutory consultation responses. The period planned between consultation and preparation of the DCO application submission documents to allow proper time to consider consultation feedback.

A Consultation Report will be prepared in due course documenting the steps taken and compliance with the regulatory requirements. It will also summarise consultation response comments and themes, together with how the application has had regard to these.

7.5. DCO submission

Our programme assumes a DCO submission in 2026. We will publicise the proposed application in accordance with section 48 of the PA2008, Regulation 13 of the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 and Regulation 4 of the Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms) Regulations 2009.

An examination will be held in 2027 and we are already considering suitable locations for the examination venue.

7.6. Post DCO engagement

Given the scale and length of the construction, engagement with the community during the construction phase will be critically important. We will work seamlessly with the Infrastructure Provider to co-ordinate engagement, developing a construction engagement plan. We will ensure we are engaging the community as one voice, with clear communication lines and feedback channels throughout all stages of construction but focussing particularly on key phases, for example site mobilisation, commencement of the dam works and release of water to the reservoir.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Technical Liaison Groups and technical topic meetings

TLG / technical meeting	Discussion topics	Members / invitees	How feedback has / is being considered
Flood risk	Flood risk modelling, opportunity for flood defence benefits and interactions with other projects.	EA, OCC & VoWH DC	Sharing of hydrological data. Discussing the approach, assumptions and modelling of flood risk. Scoping of potential wider flood risk management study.
Access and recreation	Initial discussions on the draft conservation, access and recreation strategy as well as transport and access.	EA, NE, OCC & VoWH DC	Refinement of location, interventions, design and layout of access and recreation opportunities, including access roads, indicative PRow, permissive paths, recreational facilities, parking, water sports centre and education centre.
Rail	Feasibility of using rail transit including, the volume of materials and the potential location for a rail siding and material handling site, with specific assessment of impact on existing rail network.	Network Rail, OCC & VoWH DC	Development and refinement of location of rail sidings reflecting feedback, including on rail assets and network, and potential for synergies with a potential future station at Wantage/Grove.
Aquatic environment	Methodology of water quality and flow data, as well as modelling outputs.	EA	Agreement on the scope and methodology, review of water quality and flow data, as well as quality and ecological modelling outputs. There has also been on-going discussion on WFD requirements and compliance, mitigation measures and the delivery of BNG.
Water quality (river and drinking water)	Locations for abstraction and discharge; water quality sampling methodology, reservoir geology and soil surveys & sampling, contamination potential.	DWI, NAU, EA local Teams,	Clarification provided on topic queries raised during presentation. Further meetings to be programmed as project progresses.
Terrestrial environment	Creation and retention of curlew breeding and foraging habitat to connect to existing habitat. Creation of wildlife ponds. Creation of ditches suitable for water vole.	EA	Conversations held with Freshwater Habitats Trust and RSPB to discuss wetland habitat creation for wading bird species to include the provision of wetland scapes, ponds and floodplain grassland. Habitat to potentially be fenced and located away from PRow routes so the birds remain undisturbed. Habitats may also need to be fenced appropriately to keep predators including dogs out. Habitat will have no trees or woodland within 300m which could be used for shelter by predators. Conversations held with BBoWT and NatureSpace regarding the creation of wildlife ponds for Great Crested Newts (GCN). The ponds will form part of the mitigation proposals for GCN under the District Level Licence for GCN. Where possible these will be located in relatively undisturbed parts of the site including adjacent to the southern Local Wildlife Site where a population of GCN is present. Ponds will be designed to form a metapopulation for GCN and will be

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			<p>appropriately landscaped for the species to prevent shading etc.</p> <p>Ditches within the wetland areas will be designed to support a translocated population of water vole. It is proposed that individuals captured on site (under licence) will be retained on site in newly created habitat. These ditches should have connectivity to other water features so they can be used by commuting otter.</p>
Water Resources Modelling & Licensing	To discuss the modelling work to assess the deployable output of SESRO, SESRO in combination with STT, and T2AT.	EA, OCC	Updates to water quality modelling and design development for abstraction and discharge options.
Planning	To discuss information in relation to planning and consenting.	OCC & VoWH DC	Preparation of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs)
Canal route safeguarding	To discuss how a potential future Wilts and Berks Canal route can be safeguarded through the site	Wilts and Berks Canal Trust, VoWH DC	Route safeguarded, with synergies explored with WBCT, including opportunities to design in ground levels suitable for a canal through site. Drawdown Channel design explored, albeit not preferred at current stage.
Emergency planning	Introduction to project and approach to reservoir safety Interest in needs case; approach to emergency drawdown and reservoir safety; sensitive nearby sites; dealing with protests	Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum	Agreed to provide regular updates and seek feedback at consultation stages.
Landscape & visual	<p>Focused discussion was carried out regarding technical landscape matters including viewpoint selection, the approach to the landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) and the assessment criteria. Design principles, Master Plan development and mitigation were also discussed.</p> <p>A separate site visit and Master Plan workshop with the Landscape and Visual TLG and wider representatives from the Environment Agency were carried out.</p> <p>Engagement on the approach to the arboricultural surveys was carried out as part of a wider environmental TLG meeting.</p>	OCC, SO and VoWH DCs, North Wessex Downs National Landscape, NE, EA	<p>Viewpoint locations, the approach to the LVIA and assessment criteria were developed and refined through engagement with the Landscape and Visual TLG.</p> <p>Feedback from the Landscape and Visual TLG helped to inform the Draft Design Principles for the Project (J696-AA-ZZZZ-RP-ZDP100001), related to environmental features and infrastructure, which were developed to underpin the Master Plan. Stakeholder input helped to shape the Interim Landscape and Environmental Master Plan (J696-AJ-A02X-ZZZZ-RP-EN-100010) and mitigation, for example through:</p> <p>Expanding floating islands within the reservoir to the north-west corner to soften views of the internal reservoir edges from the north Wessex Downs National Landscape.</p> <p>Sensitive design of the reservoir footprint and embankments, introducing variation in the contouring and slackening of the slopes to make it appear more natural.</p> <p>Integrating the reservoir into the wider landscape through proposed planting to reflect the existing landscape character, including hedgerows and woodlands on the reservoir embankment, as well as habitat creation around the edges of the reservoir to improve the transition to the wider landscape.</p> <p>Enhancements to PROW network and active travel provision locally.</p>

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			Sensitive positioning of Project infrastructure to reduce potential effects on North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
Historic Environment	<p>Discussion initially focussed on the extent to which design was advancing without having undertaken more consultation exercises, which could have informed design. Consultees subsequently understood that the placement of the reservoir had limited geographical options within the EIA Scoping boundary and that only minor changes to bunding were likely to be feasible for the scheme.</p> <p>More flexibility was identified in the location options of supporting infrastructure around the reservoir, for instance access roads, rail sidings, WTW and ecological/ landscaping mitigation.</p>	OCC, VoWH DC and Historic England	An onus on identifying the most sensitive areas of archaeological remains outside of the reservoir location was borne out from discussions. Where possible, flexibility regarding the optioneering of supporting infrastructure would be benefited by the targeted application of archaeological investigation at the earliest time possible.

Appendix 2: Overview of main topics raised in representations to RAPID on its Gate 2 draft decision and through ongoing engagement with stakeholders during Gate 3.

Theme	Topics raised	Responding action
Carbon	<p>More detail required on costs, scale of impact, comparisons and potential solutions.</p> <p>Impact on meeting local climate change targets (greenhouse gas targets) and approach to addressing loss of solar farms</p>	<p>Solution development for Gate 3 complies with the Water Resources Planning Guideline which sets out expectations for accounting for, and reducing, greenhouse gas emissions with mitigations included in the solution costs.</p> <p>Climate change impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions will be considered through the EIA, including the PEIR, ahead of statutory consultation.</p> <p>Renewable energy opportunities will be considered ahead of DCO submission.</p> <p>A land acquisition strategy has been prepared for Gate 3 reporting.</p>
Flood risk	<p>Flood risk concerns, including fluvial and groundwater, approach to risk assessment and consideration of mitigation opportunities, including considering the flood alleviation defence Abingdon</p>	<p>The Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) work continues to be developed in further detail, working with the EA. The FRA will be finalised and submitted as part of the DCO application in 2026.</p> <p>Groundwater monitoring as part of Ground Investigations and flow monitoring on ditches is underway to support the FRA.</p> <p>Updates have been provided to stakeholders, including through briefings and at the non-statutory consultation, with a flood risk factsheet provided to stakeholders.</p> <p>Additional flood risk alleviation opportunities are being considered jointly with EA and LAs and will be presented as part of the DCO application.</p>
Water quality	<p>Concern over potential for poor water quality and algal growth.</p> <p>Concern over sewage pollution impacting the reservoir</p>	<p>For Gate 3 the water quality modelling and assessment was updated based on latest monitoring data and was used to verify the inlet and mixing systems for the reservoir based on the current design.</p> <p>In periods of heavy prolonged rainfall, like that experienced in January 2024, the River Thames inevitably is carrying both treated and untreated sewage from treatment works upstream, albeit massively diluted by the huge natural flow in the river. As the wastewater is heavily diluted this would normally have limited bearing on our decisions on when to abstract water from the Thames into the reservoir. This is because SESRO is a raw water reservoir, meaning that all the water that we would store and take from it is fully treated to drinking water standards before going into the public water supply. There may be short periods when conditions in the River Thames are sub-optimal for abstraction, as would be the case for all reservoirs. This would not be expected to compromise the ability of SESRO supply water and such unplanned 'outage' is built into our strategic planning to account for such risks.</p>
Reservoir embankment design and safety	<p>Reservoir embankment – limited design and geotechnical information provided to date, and request for a trial embankment.</p>	<p>Engineering, hydrological and geological assessments were presented at Gate 2 and have progressed during Gate 3. An Interim Master Plan was presented for non-statutory consultation in summer 2024 and includes</p>

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	<p>Reservoir fill risk and failure risks, including sufficient freeboard, time to fill, and potential impact to local communities, request for a dam break analysis; public access security risk.</p>	<p>details of the indicative reservoir embankment size and structure.</p> <p>Ground investigations are ongoing and a Clay Compaction trial taking place with analysis from this trial feeding into the next design review.</p> <p>The large-scale trial embankment will be undertaken after DCO consent, to validate the models used in the design of the dam, particularly the response of the foundation to loading. Preliminary planning to date has concluded that the trial embankment will be undertaken in advance of the main dam earthworks, at the time of the watercourse diversions and flood compensation works, which are part of the first earthworks activities undertaken at the site.</p> <p>The simulation of the reservoir operation has been updated to take account of abstraction and discharge to the river Thames as well as direct supplies to SWOX and Southern Water.</p> <p>The design for the emergency drawdown system is being developed and will be shared ahead of the DCO submission. The latest design shows a tunnel solution as set out in the non-statutory consultation. The emergency system will be designed to operate at a 1metre/day drawdown as required by regulations, allowing water from the reservoir to be discharged into the Thames near Culham.</p> <p>The reservoir is designed to minimise the risk of a dam breach, with the reservoir design assessed through independent design and construction quality checking, overseen by a panel of independent engineering experts.</p> <p>We will work with the EA to identify scope of embankment breach analysis for the purposes of the EIA.</p> <p>Security at SESRO will be managed as is common at other large UK reservoir sites. Access to key reservoir structures will be strictly controlled, as will vehicular access onto the dam.</p>
Landscape	<p>Landscape impacts, including visual impact on local villages, with concern regarding it being a potential 'alien' and 'incongruous' feature in the countryside, concerns over its height, and the visual impact on the AONB, requiring engagement with local communities.</p>	<p>An initial LVIA assessment for Gate 2 was developed in liaison with landscape stakeholders, including NE, local authorities, and North Wessex Downs National Landscape team.</p> <p>We have commenced a project level landscape character assessment and the findings from this have informed project landscape led design principles, which we have consulted on in the summer of 2024, and of which have informed the Interim Master Plan.</p> <p>The methodology for landscape assessment has been set out in our EIA Scoping report, submitted to PINs. PINs has responded to our proposed methodology in its Scoping Opinion.</p> <p>Visuals and schematics were produced to aid effective engagement with the local community regarding the visual impact of the reservoir, including video and VR. These were used in the summer 2024 non-statutory consultation and wider stakeholder engagement.</p>
Construction	<p>Construction impact on local people and businesses, including clarification on whether construction accommodation needed.</p>	<p>A summary of the construction programme and potential impacts was presented at the summer 2024 non-statutory consultation. This included a 4-minute construction sequencing animation.</p>

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		<p>Detailed assessment of construction impacts including traffic impacts, noise and vibration and air and light pollution will be completed before submitting a Development Consent Order (DCO) application and there will be consultation on these matters through the publication of a Preliminary Environmental Information Report as part of the statutory consultation in 2025.</p> <p>The need for construction accommodation is being considered as part of the EIA and we will provide further detail as part of the PEIR and statutory consultation.</p>
Environmental assessment	Environmental impact assessment, including need for a EIA, impact on noise, traffic, air pollution, microclimate, habitats and species, risk of INNs, and delivery of BNG.	<p>The environmental, BNG and natural capital assessments have been completed in line with WRMP24 guidelines supplementary guidance and were published as part of the Gate 2 submission.</p> <p>For Gate 3, environmental considerations have been integral to the options appraisal process and the subsequent landscape and environment led Interim Master Plan.</p> <p>Updated HRA, BNG, WFD, Benefits Appraisal and Landscape strategy form part of our Gate 3 reporting</p> <p>For the SESRO DCO application an EIA in which the effects of SESRO will be assessed and proposals for mitigating any adverse effects will be carried out. As part of this process, an EIA Scoping Opinion was requested from PINS in August 2024, with an Opinion provided by PINS on 7 October.</p>
Transport	Reducing transport impacts through non car modes and use of rail with suggestion for a linked opportunity of a Wantage / Grove station.	<p>Our options appraisals include consideration of access road, road diversion, ADC and provision of rail sidings.</p> <p>Our Interim Master Plan includes a temporary railway siding to enable the transportation of materials to site by rail. There may be an opportunity to repurpose the temporary siding into a permanent railway station. We will facilitate discussions on this, but it does not form part of the project. The Interim Master Plan also includes active travel opportunities, including new footpaths and cycleways.</p>
Social and recreational benefits	<p>Social and recreation benefits these should be fully explored, including for sport, leisure, green infrastructure amongst others,</p> <p>Opportunity to support the Wilts and Berks canal restoration.</p>	<p>An initial conservation, access, and recreation strategy was carried out as part of the Gate 2 assessments.</p> <p>As part of developing the Interim Master Plan we shared our early work with stakeholders and representatives of the local community, whose knowledge and understanding of the area has been valuable in creating this initial plan.</p> <p>We have included a wide range of benefits for the environment and the community in the Interim Master Plan and sought feedback on this through our summer 2024 non-statutory consultation.</p> <p>The Interim Master Plan includes new wetland areas and other habitats for a wide range of wildlife; a network of footpaths to explore the site, bird hides, water sports centre, education centre and cafes.</p> <p>As the designs develop for the reservoir, we continue to work with the community to develop a design that delivers opportunities for accessible recreation, leisure and education; working with local groups to incorporate activities such as sailing, fishing, bird watching, paddle/wind sports, running, cycling and trail walking.</p>

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		<p>We have carried out an optioneering assessment on options for a tunnel and above ground channel (suitable for navigation) for emergency reservoir discharge. A tunnel was set out as our preferred option in our non-statutory summer 2024 consultation as it reduces engineering complexity, reduces land take, reduces impact on the River Thames floodplain and generally reduces environmental impacts compared to an above ground channel option. Feedback on the options will be considered alongside new information, before statutory consultation in 2025, and ahead of a DCO application in 2026. We continue to work with stakeholders to understand how we could support the future proofing of the canal through the reservoir site, for example in terms of suitable ground levels and gradients for the canal, and this will be set out in our designs for the DCO application.</p>
Stakeholder and customer engagement	<p>Enhance engagement, with greater transparency, with the public and stakeholders, including the local authorities, Historic England, MPs, Parishes, including on landscaping, flood risk, historic environment, construction impacts and bill impact.</p> <p>Customer preferences should consider local community not just wider Thames Water base</p>	<p>Extensive engagement and consultation with stakeholders and customers, including local authorities, technical stakeholders, land owners and local communities in the vicinity of proposed new infrastructure has and continues to be undertaken.</p> <p>Engagement has included community events; technical working groups; briefings; legacy workshops; SESRO newsletter, monthly Parish newsletter updates; and social media updates.</p> <p>A 12 week summer consultation focused on seeking feedback on the interim masterplan, design principles and associated infrastructure options. The consultation received over 1600 responses.</p> <p>In February 2024 we asked over 1,000 people, who live in close proximity to the proposed reservoir site, and from across the wider South East, their attitudes to the proposed reservoir and what activities and facilities they would like to see at the site. We have considered their feedback in the emerging design.</p>
Deployable output	Deployable output assessments and stochastic flow data plus consideration of performance in drought	More detailed assessments were completed on deployable output, verified through an independent external auditor, as part of the water resource management planning process and the stochastic assessments comply with the Water Resource Planning Guideline.
Costs and best value	Cost of SESRO including concerns over the scale of its construction and operating costs, its financial burden, and transparency on impact on customer bills	<p>Updated costs have been presented in our Gate 3 report. This includes a full cost report. Costs will continue to be reviewed and refined, with monitoring by RAPID through regular checkpoint meetings.</p> <p>The SESRO Gate 3 submission includes a summary of the best value considerations including updated summary of socio-economic benefits.</p>
Water resource planning	Water resource planning – concerns over data used e.g. on population and climate change forecast, preference for reducing leakage further and alternative schemes such as a smaller SESRO, STT, water recycling and nature based solutions	A wide range of solutions, both demand side measures and supply side measures, have been considered in regional plans and WRMPs. The need for solutions, and the decisions on whether solutions ultimately go ahead, will be made through water resource planning processes and subsequent applications for planning and environmental consents. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has approved Thames Water's Water Resource Management Plan (WRMP). On reaching the decision to approve Thames Water's plan, the Secretary of State concluded that the strategic need for SESRO has been demonstrated.



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