

15<sup>th</sup> July 2016



Chris Schmidt-Reid,  
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Dear Chris

**New Wycombe District and Aylesbury Vale District Local Plans – Proposed Safeguarding of the Chinnor Upper Thames Reservoir (UTR) Site**

Further to my email dated 28<sup>th</sup> June and the subsequent meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> July, I am writing to provide further detail on the justification for the safeguarding of the Chinnor Upper Thames Reservoir (UTR) site.

**Introduction**

The majority of the Chinnor UTR site is located within South Oxfordshire. However, the top third is split roughly equally between Wycombe and Aylesbury Vale Districts as illustrated on the enclosed plan. South Oxfordshire Council have recently commenced consultation on their new Local Plan 2032 Preferred Options which makes reference to the proposed Chinnor UTR safeguarding on page 55, paragraph 7.12. (<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/SODC%20LP2032%20preferred%20options%20low-res.pdf>)

Thames Water consider that the new Wycombe District and Aylesbury Vale District Local Plans and Policies Maps should similarly safeguard the top third of the Chinnor UTR site. Such safeguarding of the Chinnor UTR site is in accordance with the safeguarding of the two alternative UTR sites located near Abingdon and Longworth under Core Policy 14 of the emerging Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part One: Strategic Sites and Policies which has recently undergone an Examination.

**Need to Safeguard Chinnor UTR Site**

As a statutory water undertaker, Thames Water has an obligation under section 37 of the Water Industry Act 1991 to develop and maintain an efficient and economical system of water supply. The company is required to produce, every five years, a Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP), setting out how it plans to maintain the balance between supply and demand for water over a 25 year period. Thames Water's current WRMP was approved in 2014 and covers the period 2105-2040 ('WRMP14'). The full WRMP14 is available at:

<http://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/5392.htm>.

Thames Water's approved WRMP14 identifies the need for a large water supply scheme to supply additional water resource from the mid 2020s onwards. The preferred scheme included in the plan is a 150 MI/d wastewater reuse scheme. However, the robustness and resilience of this chosen option for water supply has not been confirmed and there remain a number of uncertainties associated with the scheme which require further work and resolution over the next 4 years. Given these uncertainties, the WRMP14 identifies three potential water supply options (wastewater reuse scheme, inter basin raw water transfer scheme,



reservoir storage option within the Thames catchment) to be subject to detailed further studies over the 5 year period to 2019 to determine what represents the 'best value' water supply option for Thames Water to promote in its updated WRMP which will be submitted to the Secretary of State for approval in 2019, covering the period 2020-2045 ('WRMP19').

Thames Water's work for WRMP14 short listed three potential sites in Oxfordshire and surrounding area that would be able to accommodate a new raw water storage reservoir. The Abingdon Reservoir site is on the area of land between Steventon, Drayton and East Hanney, to the south west of Abingdon which is safeguarded under Core Policy 14 of the draft Vale of White Horse Local Plan. The Abingdon site is the only one that can accommodate a raw water storage reservoir development greater than 100Mm<sup>3</sup> (> 275 MI/d) and previous studies identified Abingdon as the preferred site on the basis of the size of reservoir that the site could accommodate and the forecast supply demand gap (need) at the time.

However, if WRMP19 concludes that a smaller reservoir is the preferred option or that a smaller reservoir is required to store water as part of the regional water transfer option, following the further studies over the next 4 years, the work done to date has identified a reservoir at Longworth (up to 50Mm<sup>3</sup>), located in Vale of White Horse and Chinnor (up to 100Mm<sup>3</sup>) as possible alternative options. Based on experience at the Abingdon Reservoir site which has been subject to development pressure such as the Oxford Garden City proposal and the granting of planning permission for solar farms, Thames Water consider it is important that the Chinnor Reservoir site (and the Longworth Reservoir site) is similarly safeguarded (in addition to the Abingdon Reservoir site) until the outcome of WRMP19.

WRMPs are subject to strategic environmental assessment (SEA) under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Thames Water's SEA post-adoption statement for the WRMP14 can be viewed at:

<https://www.thameswater.co.uk/tw/common/downloads/environment/Final-EA-report.pdf>

Amongst other things, the document explains how environmental considerations have been integrated into the WRMP, following consultations.

Ensuring the long term security and resilience of drinking water supplies for its customers is thus an important focus of Thames Water's work. Particular challenges in this respect include projected population growth in Thames Water's area, particularly in Greater London but also in the wider Thames Valley, and climate change, which brings increased risk of drought. Much of Thames Water's region is already classified by the Environment Agency as 'seriously water stressed'.

The executive summary of TW's final WRMP 2014 can be viewed at:

[http://www.thameswater.co.uk/tw/common/downloads/wrmp/WRMP14\\_Section\\_0.pdf](http://www.thameswater.co.uk/tw/common/downloads/wrmp/WRMP14_Section_0.pdf)

It explains how Thames Water proposes to develop and maintain an efficient and economical system of water supply. Section 0.7 provides a summary of how the supply and demand balance has worsened across Thames Water's water supply area. Sections 0.9 – 0.13 summarise the options and programmes that TW has considered to maintain water supplies. These include a combination of measures, including demand management, leakage reduction, raw water trading agreements with other utilities and measures to manage groundwater resources, including aquifer recharge.

Section 0.14 identifies Thames Water's priorities for future updates of its WRMP. These include *'Investigation of large resource schemes: three long term options of regional water transfers, storage and wastewater reuse will be subject to more detailed study in the 2015-2020 period to enable the best value option to be identified for WRMP19'* – i.e. the next WRMP update due in 2019. In other words, the current WRMP acknowledges that demand management measures alone are unlikely to address the predicted long term water supply shortfall, and that major investment in water transfer, storage or reuse infrastructure will be required.

Thames Water is now implementing a more detailed programme of studies to inform WRMP19. The work is being undertaken in four phases as follows:

- **Phase 1:** review and comparison of all strategic options for large scale water supply, taking into account factors including engineering scope and risk, cost, the frequency and duration of operation, environmental and recreational effects and planning and operational risk. The purpose of this review was to develop a shortlist of feasible options for more detailed assessment and to identify further investigations that might be required to inform screening decisions. Reporting is available at: [http://www.thameswater.co.uk/tw/common/downloads/wrmp/Briefing\\_paper\\_on\\_options\\_and\\_assessment\\_updated\\_following\\_the\\_meeting.pdf](http://www.thameswater.co.uk/tw/common/downloads/wrmp/Briefing_paper_on_options_and_assessment_updated_following_the_meeting.pdf)
- **Phase 2:** detailed investigations to address the main areas of uncertainty associated with the shortlisted options. The screening reports prepared in Phase 1 will be updated in August 2016 (for large options) and again in June 2017 (for small and large options) to take account of new information arising from the investigations.
- **Phase 3:** following completion of the phase 2 studies, the cost estimates for all feasible options, including capital, operating, carbon, environmental and social costs, will be updated. This work will inform the relevant provisions in WRMP19.
- **Phase 4:** this phase of work will take the preferred (best value) large water resource option identified in WRMP19 through to outline design for consenting purposes.

Engagement with regulators and stakeholders will continue throughout the four phases.

In a densely-populated region with relatively gentle terrain and a high degree of landscape, ecological and cultural heritage constraints, the options for additional reservoir capacity are limited. In studies undertaken to date, potential reservoir sites in the upper Thames catchment have performed consistently well against sustainability criteria. However, relatively few unconstrained sites have been identified for the purpose of technical feasibility analysis in considering the storage option. These are at Abingdon and Longworth in the Vale of White Horse area and the site near Chinnor in South Oxfordshire District, Wycombe District and Aylesbury Vale District area. Please find enclosed a short document that summarises the work undertaken to date to evaluate reservoir options.

Thames Water therefore consider that the Chinnor UTR site, as identified on the attached plan, should be safeguarded in the same way as the Abingdon and Longworth UTR sites by the addition of an appropriate safeguarding policy in the South Oxfordshire, Wycombe District and Aylesbury Vale District Local Plans and the associated identification of the site on the Policies Maps. This will ensure that all of the reservoir storage options are treated in a consistent way and will prevent any of the options from being prejudiced by inappropriate development ahead of the completion of the studies to be undertaken over the next 4 years in accordance with WRMP14/WRMP19.

An indicative layout plan for the Chinnor Reservoir from the original site selection is also attached for information.

### **Proposed Chinnor UTR Site Safeguarding**

#### **Policies Map**

The Policies Map should safeguard the proposed Chinnor UTR site as identified on the attached plan.

### **Proposed New Policy and Supporting Text in Line with Policy 14 of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan**

#### **“Policy ??: Upper Thames Reservoir – Chinnor Site**

**Land is safeguarded for a reservoir and ancillary works to the north of Chinnor unless subsequent publication of Thames Water’s Water Resources Management Plan 2019 indicates that the location is**

not necessary for future reservoir provision. Development that might prejudice the implementation of the Upper Thames Reservoir will be refused.

The safeguarded area for the proposed reservoir is shown on the Adopted Policies Map.

The proposed reservoir, if included as a preferred option in an adopted Water Resources Management Plan, must be brought forward through a Masterplan, Development Brief and Design Statement following consultation on these documents by Thames Water with the community, the local authority, the local highway authority and the statutory environmental bodies and utility providers.

Any proposal for a reservoir must:

- i. mitigate the impact of construction on local people, the environment and roads
- ii. minimise the effects on the landscape of an embankment reservoir through its design, general configuration and the use of hard and soft landscaping
- iii. maximise the creation of wildlife habitats and biodiversity
- iv. promote the recreational uses of the reservoir consistent with the landscaping and biodiversity values of the proposal and having regard to the traffic impacts of such uses, and
- v. include measures to avoid or mitigate any other significant adverse effects identified through the environmental impact assessment of the proposal, including on the local and wider highway networks and on surface water and fluvial flooding.”

#### **Supporting Text**

The following text should be included to support the above proposed policy:

##### ***“The Upper Thames Reservoir***

***Thames Water is examining the means by which sufficient water can be provided to meet future needs of the region. Shortlisted options under consideration include new strategic water storage capacity in the Upper Thames catchment. Thames Water has identified the possible need for a major new reservoir in the district to the north of the village of Chinnor (located within South Oxfordshire, Wycombe and Aylesbury Vale Districts) to help manage water supply and ensure current and future needs can be met.***

***The Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) 2014, published by Thames Water, identifies three potential options to address its long term water resource management in the south east, including the development of a large storage reservoir, wastewater reuse and water transfer option.***

***Thames Water has confirmed that the Upper Thames Reservoir (UTR), proposed to be located within the Vale of White Horse District at Abingdon, remains their preferred option if a large storage reservoir solution were to be selected. If a smaller reservoir is selected as the preferred option or required in association with a water transfer option, the reservoir site at Chinnor is an alternative option. A decision is expected on the preferred long term water resource option by 2019, when Thames Water’s Resources Management Plan 2019 is expected to be approved for publication by the Secretary of State.***

***As [South Oxfordshire’s/Wycombe District’s/Aylesbury Vale District’s] Local Plan will be adopted ahead of the WRMP 2019, land will need to continue to be safeguarded for new reservoir capacity in accordance with Policy ??.***

***The site will continue to be safeguarded until such time as it is no longer considered necessary, as set out in the approved WRMP 2019, or in light of subsequent decisions made by Thames Water or the Secretary of State.***

***The Upper Thames Reservoir proposal, if progressed, is likely to constitute a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project under the Planning Act 2008, for which a Development Consent Order would be sought from the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs..”***

I trust the above is helpful, but please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss further. If you are interested in attending the regular Water Resources Forum, Mark Mathews will be able to arrange this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Wilson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Wilson BA (Hons), BTP, MRTPI  
Associate Director Planning

Cc: Peter Williams and David Broadley at Aylesbury Vale District Council  
Mark Mathews, Thames Water