

REPORT OF RESERVOIR ADVISORY GROUP
TO THE EXECUTIVE
3 FEBRUARY 2006

Reservoir

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 6 January 2006, the Executive noted that a Reservoir Advisory Group had been set up to advise the Executive on matters relating to Thames Water's provisional proposal for a reservoir to the south-west of Abingdon. The Advisory Group met on 17 January to consider the latest position and has made recommendations below.
- 1.2 The contact officer for this report is Steve Culliford, Democratic Services Officer, telephone 01235 540307.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 *that the Advisory Group's business remains confidential until the Advisory Group has indicated otherwise and recommends so to the Executive; and*
- 2.2 *that this Council should act as if it were the determining authority in any application for a reservoir proposal.*

3.0 Probity

- 3.1 The Advisory Group discussed the status of its papers and deliberations with regard to probity. At the Executive meeting held on 6 January 2006 it was reported that the Advisory Group had been set up under delegated authority and that its meetings would be private to this Council, although there was an open invitation for other Members of the Council to attend as observers.
- 3.2 In conclusion, the Advisory Group considers that its business must remain confidential until the Advisory Group has indicated otherwise and recommends so to the Executive.

4.0 Reservoir Proposal: Current Position

- 4.1 The Advisory Group noted details of Thames Water's project. There are two planned phases of consultation. The first is consultation on the needs case and site selection for an 'Upper Thames Major Resource Development'. The second is consultation on Thames Water's preferred scheme and the construction design options. Further consultation will also be carried out on the scoping of the Environmental Impact Assessment. If the result of the consultation process is Thames Water's confirmation that the construction of a reservoir is its preferred option, it will progress towards the formal submission of an application, provisionally programmed for September 2007. A public inquiry will hear objections to the proposal, which is likely to be held some time in 2008.
- 4.2 Thames Water has confirmed that the proposal for a single large reservoir to the south-west of Abingdon is its "provisional preferred option" to meet the need for an additional water resource. Thames Water is updating its earlier work on the need for a major new water resource in the

Upper Thames area, the analysis of options, and the analysis of alternative sites. On-site ecological and geological surveys are also taking place.

4.3 General information is known about Thames Water's proposal as follows:

- The surface area covered by water will be about 7.5 km² (i.e. more than three times the size of Farmoor Reservoir)
- The volume of stored water will be about 150 million cubic metres (150,000 million litres), which will cover the future estimated need for water over an 18-month drought
- The reservoir embankments may be up to 25 metres (82 feet) high
- An intake/outfall pipe will link the reservoir to the River Thames
- A pipeline will need to link the reservoir to Farmoor Reservoir, unless a water treatment plant is built on site as part of the development of the new reservoir
- Most of the length of the Steventon to Hanney road will need to be diverted
- About 4 million tonnes of construction material will need to be imported, most of which could be delivered to the site by rail via new railway sidings
- Thames Water estimates the total cost at £900 million
- Thames Water is building a detailed needs case based on projected supply and demand

4.4 Thames Water's current proposal is to submit an application for a Compulsory Works Order under Section 167 of the Water Industry Act 1991. This will bring together all of the consents and authorisations required for the construction of the reservoir, including deemed planning permission. If given the go-ahead, construction of the reservoir could start around 2010-2011 and is likely to take around 10 years to complete and fill. The alternative route is for a planning application to be submitted. Any such application is highly likely to be called in by the Secretary of State for determination.

4.5 The Advisory Group considers that as the above information has been made public by Thames Water, it could be made available to the public through the Council's website. However, Thames Water should confirm that it is happy for this information to be released. The Advisory Group has asked that all Members of the Council are sent a copy of the published information. Members also discussed the possibility of a periodic briefing note to update Members on the Reservoir. It was suggested that this should coincide with reports from the Advisory Group to the Executive.

5.0 **Implications for the Council if a Compulsory Works Order is Used**

5.1 If Thames Water uses the Compulsory Works Order route, this will bring together all consents and authorisations required for the construction of the reservoir, including deemed planning permission and section 106 obligations. A public inquiry will still be held to hear objections to the proposal, before the decision is made by the Secretary of State.

5.2 This Council will be a statutory consultee but the County Council will not. This Council should therefore be the lead local authority. The Advisory Group believes that this Council should act as if it is the determining authority in any application for a reservoir proposal.

6.0 **Engaging Other Organisations**

6.1 The Advisory Group considered how the Council should engage with other organisations on the reservoir proposal. Firstly, in the interest of probity, it was considered important for Members to remain distant from any discussions with Thames Water. The officers will liaise with the Environment Agency, OFWAT, Oxfordshire County Council, local Town and Parish Councils and South Oxfordshire District Council. The County Council's interests are:

- strategic planning authority
- transport and highways issues
- any mineral extraction and importation of waste

- archaeology
- ecology

6.2 Members are aware that the County Council's Scrutiny Committee undertook a two-day evidence gathering exercise about the reservoir and is due to produce a report. The Advisory Group considers that a copy of the County Scrutiny Committee's report should be sought, together with clarification from the County Council of how it intends to proceed with this issue.

7.0 **Resource Implications**

The Advisory Group considers that officer resources required for work on the reservoir will be dependent on the content of Thames Water's consultation document and upon the level of work carried out by other agencies.

Councillors Tony de Vere (Chair)
Terry Cox (Chairman)
Terry Fraser
Melinda Tilley
Jerry Patterson (apologies for absence)
John Dunsdon (absent)
Richard Webber (absent)

RESERVOIR ADVISORY GROUP

Background Papers: None