

Thames Water's upper Thames major resource development (UTMRD)

Briefing on the Environment Agency's position and role

24 July 2006

Background

Thames Water believes that it will need a major new source of water to meet the forecast demand by around 2020. Its current preferred option is a new storage reservoir to the south-west of Abingdon, which would be filled from the River Thames.

Demand for water is forecast to increase, particularly in London and across the south-east of England, where significant housing growth is planned. The population in London is forecast to increase by about 315,000¹ by 2030 and for the rest of the south-east of England by 800,000² by 2017.

Leakage reduction and demand management, ways of reducing water use, are vital parts of the strategy to meet this increased demand. However, they will not remove the need for new sources of water such as a desalination plant, a reservoir or movement of water from another part of the country. Companies must also consider the potential impact of climate change on the yield of any of these options.

Thames Water is currently preparing the case to justify the proposed reservoir. It plans to consult on the first stages of this in autumn 2006.

Key messages

- This is Thames Water's project – we will scrutinise its proposals.
- Our role is to make sure that there is proper use of water resources in the Thames catchment and to review the need for any new resources.
- We agree that Thames Water cannot meet the forecast growth in demand for water through demand management and leakage reduction alone but we are yet to be convinced that it needs the proposed reservoir.
- We support Thames Water's work to investigate the options it has to balance supply and demand but we believe the company should have done more over the last 15 years to reduce leakage, increase household metering and put practical measures in place to help its customers save water.
- We recognise that new reservoirs are an important option for managing water resources and maintaining supply. But a new reservoir is only one of the many options which we would expect Thames Water to consider.

¹ London Housing capacity Study – 2004

² South East Plan draft Consultation

Before Thames Water announce their preferred option we will want them to:

- Justify that they need more water and how much this is.
- Choose an appropriate package of measures, which we expect to include demand management, leakage reduction and possibly new sources of water.

Our experts will then carefully consider all the information provided and use it to inform our decision. We will then advise Government of our view.

If Thames Water were to justify that they need more water and that the best option is a reservoir, we will:

- Ensure that there is an appropriate assessment of alternative sites.
- Ensure that the proposal includes appropriate ways to mitigate environmental impacts and, where possible, provides wider benefits for recreation and other water users.
- Determine any environmental permits associated with the development including the abstraction licence, discharge consent and land drainage consents. These will include when and under what conditions, the company can abstract water from, and return it to, the River Thames.
- Ensure that any development has a full flood risk assessment and does not increase the flood risk.
- Advise Government of our position and issues surrounding the planning, construction and operation of a reservoir.

We do not cover:

- Air quality and noise pollution during construction - this is the responsibility of the Vale of White Horse District Council
- Traffic issues surrounding construction and operation of the reservoir - this is the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council.
- Visual impacts of the reservoir or amenity once it is built – this is the responsibility of Vale of White Horse District Council.

Glossary

Demand management = reducing water use

Leakage reduction = reducing the amount of water leaking from water main network

New sources of water = such as reservoirs, desalination plants, reuse schemes or transfer of water from other parts of the country.

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