

## SESRO comment

East Challow Parish Council objects very strongly to the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO), which is proposed to be situated between East Hanney and Steventon, for reasons (i) specific to East Challow, (ii) affecting the wider community in the Vale of Whitehorse District and (iii) some of which have national significance.

Objections specific to East Challow include:

1. SESRO is regarded as a megaproject with the reservoir containing 150 million cubic metres equivalent to 150 billion litres of water, although this has varied with different iterations presented to the public. It is estimated to take 10-15 years in its construction. There are quarries on the A417 (Shellingford Quarry) at Stanford in the Vale and Faringdon which are likely to be major suppliers of basic stone, gravel and sand required during its construction. We are likely to see a huge increase in traffic through East Challow which sits on the A417. We already experience excessive HGV traffic through the village associated with this quarry. Whether or not there will be a constant requirement for raw material throughout the reservoir construction period, East Challow will be disrupted further by heavy traffic associated with SESR.

Not only will this increased heavy traffic affect East Challow (A417) but it will also affect the western routes through Wantage, that being the Denchworth Road with residential properties and a special needs school along it. These roads were never designed to take this weight of traffic and this is seen by the constant damage and subsequent repair of the Denchworth Road and Camel crossroads.

2. We reiterate that we object to this project. Should the Secretary of State finally approve it we will require the completion of the western relief road which will relieve East Challow and Wantage of HGV traffic which is a source of danger to pedestrians in East Challow and on the Denchworth Road in Wantage.

Objections specific to the wider Vale of Whitehorse include:

3. Safety. The reservoir bund will be ca. 100ft (30m) high. This will be inappropriately imposing in an essentially rural environment, equal to a third of the height of the London Shard and St Paul's Cathedral. The bund presents a risk of failure as has occurred with previous similar dams (Defra report SC080046/R1). In this regard, its proximity to both East and West Hanney, particularly the houses on the Steventon Road estate, is a clear concern. Release of water from the reservoir would create serious

problems much further afield including Wantage, the Challows, and Letcombes apart from Steventon and Abingdon.

4. The huge amount of water stored will inevitably have an effect on the Thames from which the water will be drawn. It is estimated that it will take up to 18 months to fill. Once full it will serve a population increase of between 1.4 million and 4 million which will require water being drawn off at a rate of between 182 million and 560 million litres per day requiring water to be taken from the Thames at this rate. This could have a serious detrimental effect on the water level and, as a consequence, the oxygen levels, affecting wildlife in and adjacent to the river.

National concerns include:

5. It is estimated that several times the volume of the reservoir is lost from leaking infrastructure, mainly pipes, in the South East. Thames Water certainly does not have a good reputation for “fixing the leaks” and improving the infrastructure suitable for the 21st century. We believe that this should be a priority rather than embarking on a megaproject such as the SESRO. Embarking on this routine maintenance would give customers more confidence in proposed priorities such as SESRO.

6. Rather than a large megareservoir, the advantages of several smaller reservoirs have been proposed. These might be situated in several different locations in several counties with much reduced impact and disruption. There is still a great deal of arable land in the vicinity of the reservoirs at Wraysbury and Datchet and in much closer proximity to the target population.

7. Basic technologies could be improved to maximise use of existing reservoirs. It is said that during the heavy rain of winter 2023/4 Farmoor reservoir was unable to extract water from the Thames because the latter was badly silted. This could conceivably also occur for the SESR so that at the time of maximum availability water could become difficult to extract from The Thames. During particularly hot summers as is predicted for the future, The Thames could become dry if extraction continues for both Farmoor and SESR.

8. In a similar vein the load could be spread between other river systems including the Severn in addition to the Thames.

9. The projected increase in the population in the Southeast varies between 1.4M and 4M residents depending on the source of the projected numbers. The daily average consumption of water in the UK is 140 litres per day. This equates to consumption of between 182 million and 560 million litres which is a fraction of the reservoir size. Not only do the figures not add up but extraction of this amount from the Thames could devastate the river ecosystem even during the winter. We believe that the environmental effects have not been considered properly.

10. Overall, the reputation of Thames Water in treating their customers is appalling and gives no confidence that the project will be well managed both in terms of cost, cost-effectiveness, minimising environmental harm and value for the customer.

11. Thames Water is in financial difficulty. How can they afford build such a huge reservoir. There will also be miles and miles of pipeline which need to be buried for this project. Taking 10-15 years to build this is going to cost billions and billions, and as usual with such projects the end cost is likely to double or triple the original estimate. Is it going to be another botched HS2 project with spiralling costs which is then cancelled after the work has been started?

We are very seriously concerned with these plans.