Factsheet

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

The proposed reservoir will require a range of consents to enable it to proceed, including a Development Consent Order (DCO). The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a key part of the DCO process.

What does an EIA do?

EIAs are used to evaluate the potential environmental consequences or impacts of proposed projects. The EIA process involves gathering and analysing data on various environmental factors such as ecology, landscape, water resources and social aspects to determine how the proposed project may affect the environment. The primary goal of the EIA is to identify and minimise potential negative impacts while maximising the positive ones. As we develop our designs, the EIA process helps us make informed choices that promote sustainable development and protect the environment.

Surveys

We have started surveys in the local area and we're also conducting desk studies to gather valuable information which we will use to inform our future design and plans for the proposed reservoir. You may see our teams and contractors carrying out surveys and ground investigations in the area. This work will continue through 2024 and beyond.

The information gained from this work will help us to shape our plans, including our construction techniques. We'll also use the information to help us complete an EIA for the project as we move through 2025 and into 2026.

EIA Scoping

We are currently developing an EIA Scoping Report to set out the proposed scope of the EIA and methods of assessment that we intend to use. We plan to submit this report to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) in Summer 2024 for its consideration. The Scoping Opinion received from PINS will be used to form the basis of the assessments required for the EIA.

Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR)

Once we've agreed the scope of the EIA, we'll carry out a preliminary environmental impact assessment. This will enable us to write a Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR).

This preliminary assessment will represent a point in the process when the design of the project is still in development, and the likely significant effects are continuing to be understood. We'll present these early assessment outcomes and you will have a chance to give us your views.

The PEIR will consider the current and future environment in and surrounding the proposed reservoir site area. It will also assess the effects that the construction and operation of the reservoir will have on the environment. This will take account of the sensitivity of environmental features and the magnitude of impact upon them. The PEIR will identify ways to mitigate any significant effects.

Environmental Statement

The final results of our environmental assessment work will be published in an Environmental Statement. This will be included as part of our application for development consent that we will submit to PINS, who will examine the application on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for consideration in 2026. The Environmental Statement and accompanying application documents will be taken into account by the Secretary of State in deciding whether or not to grant consent for the proposed reservoir.

The government is proposing to move to a more outcomes based environmental assessment system which will result in the production of an Environmental Outcomes Report. If applicable (depending on when it comes into force) this new process will be followed, although the underlying principles of environmental assessment and mitigation are expected to be similar.

Mitigation measures

Environmental mitigation refers to the measures proposed to avoid, reduce or offset the negative environmental impacts of a project. Mitigation measures will be project-specific but can include, for example, adopting technologies that minimise pollution or emissions, implementing conservation and restoration efforts, implementing best management practices, altering project design or location to minimise impacts, or establishing environmental monitoring and management systems.

What topics are included in the Environmental Statement?

The topics that will be addressed in the Environmental Statement include the following:

- Landscape and Visual - Some landscapes and views would potentially be changed by the construction of the proposed reservoir, with the introduction of a large body of open water with raised embankments (bunds) within a flat landscape. This may include the loss of farmland and vegetation, including trees and visual effects on parts of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. Mitigation could include sensitive reservoir design and planting of trees and hedgerows.

- Ecology - Land and aquatic ecology can be affected by new development. Impacts are assessed on habitats and protected or notable species (such as great crested newts, bats, badgers, birds, dormice, reptiles, otters, water voles, fish, and invertebrates). The potential impacts of invasive non-native species (e.g. Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, American mink, and signal crayfish) or nuisance species such as flies are also considered. Proposed DCO projects submitted for approval from November 2025 will need to demonstrate a biodiversity net gain. This requires that the quality and diversity of new habitats created by the project will be an improvement on those that they replace.

- The Water Environment – Aside from assessments for aquatic ecology, other aspects of the water environment are assessed. This includes topics such as flood risk, surface and groundwater quality, surface and groundwater flows including impacts on rivers and water courses.

- Soils and Geology – The soils and geology assessment will cover potential impacts on soils and the ecosystem, sites of geological importance and land contamination. The proposed reservoir would affect a large area of agricultural land and soils. However, there are no known areas of geological importance at the proposed reservoir site.

- The Historic Environment - There are no legally protected historic assets within the proposed reservoir site boundary. However, there are listed buildings, conservation areas, registered parks and gardens and scheduled monuments in the wider area. Previous studies indicate the presence of archaeological remains within the site and extensive surveys will take place to determine this information. These investigations could also allow for the discovery and study of currently unknown archaeology.

- Noise and Vibration - Computer modelling is used to predict noise levels at various locations to identify areas requiring noise mitigation. Noise monitoring equipment would be used during construction and mitigation may include the use of mounds to screen noisy activities, sensitive construction programming and carrying out noisy activities as far as practicable from residential dwellings. For operational noise sources, mitigation measures may include the positioning of the buildings, consideration to building designs and the type of operational machinery used. Vibration levels will also be assessed for both construction and operation.

- Air Quality – During reservoir construction, air quality issues can arise from dust caused by excavation and handling, machinery and vehicle movements, and wind blowing across surfaces. Vehicle movements during construction would be minimised as we are proposing to use the railway to bring materials and equipment into the site where practicable. Once the reservoir is open there will be vehicle movements from members of the public accessing the reservoir. However, this is unlikely to result in significant air quality effects as the use of electric vehicles increases in the future. On-site operational buildings, machinery and processes are not likely to lead to significant air emissions.

- The Community - A range of potential effects on people and the community are assessed including effects on health, socioeconomics, demographics and recreation. Assessment includes potential negative effects (such as noise disturbance) and positive effects from increased access to nature and active travel options such as walking and cycling. In the long term, the proposed reservoir would result in positive benefits for the local and wider community by providing a major recreational resource.

- **Materials and Waste** – All construction projects use materials and produce waste. The proposed reservoir site has an underlying clay geology which can be excavated and used to build the embankments of the reservoir, reducing the volume of construction materials needed to be brought onto the site. We'll look at ways to reduce the quantity of materials required and the waste generated in constructing and operating the reservoir. We'll also look at the opportunities for the use of sustainable materials and managing waste by re-use, recycling, or material recovery, wherever practicable.

- **Traffic and Transport** - Traffic and transport assessment looks at issues such as road safety, congestion, road capacity, severance, effects on drivers and other road users such as pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders. The assessment also considers the use of Public Rights of Way and opportunities for sustainable (non-car) travel modes. The results of the assessment will be used to help design access to the proposed reservoir. The site is close to the Great Western Railway line and the project aims to create rail sidings to allow most construction materials to be imported by rail.
- **Climate** - This assessment looks at a development's greenhouse gas emissions and impact on climate both now and in the future. It identifies a development's main source of greenhouse gas emissions during construction and operation to find the most effective ways of reducing them.

- **Major Accidents and Disasters** - Major accidents and disasters are considered and assessed. Hazards are identified along with the likelihood of an event occurring. Risk assessment methods are used to analyse the risk of the project resulting in a major accident or disaster.

- **Cumulative effects** – There are two types of cumulative effects considered: Intra-development effects and Inter-development effects. Intra-development effects are those that occur because of multiple factors happening within the same development or project (e.g. noise and visual impacts affecting the same dwelling). Inter-development impacts are those that occur from multiple developments in the same area (e.g. a new reservoir being constructed at the same time as a new housing development in the local area).

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