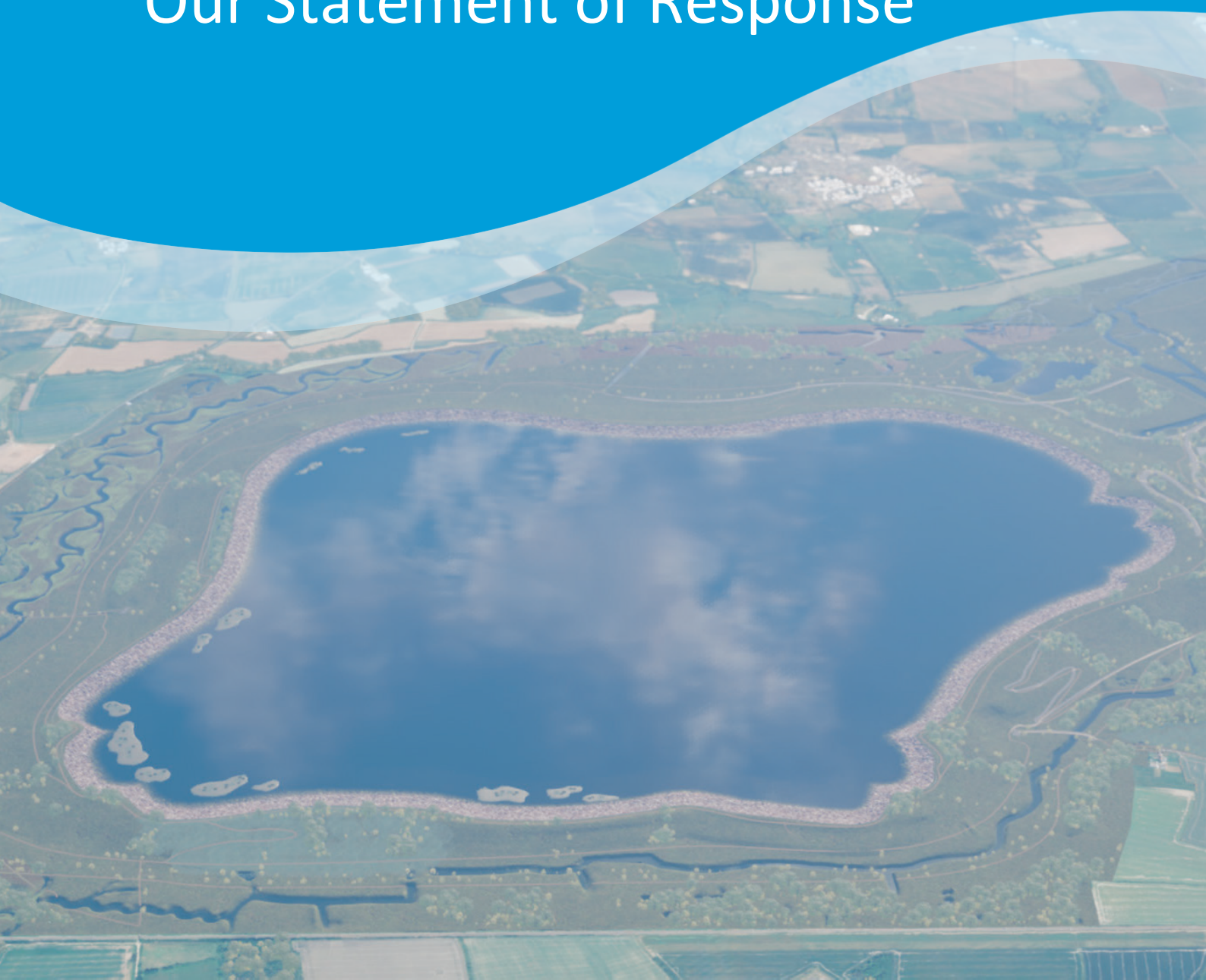
South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO)

Non-statutory Public Consultation 2024

Our Statement of Response



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Glossary

Term	Definition
Abstraction	The removal of water from the ground or rivers. Abstractions are licensed by the Environment Agency
Development Consent Order (DCO)	A statutory instrument required to consent nationally significant infrastructure in the UK
Planning Inspectorate (PINS)	The Planning Inspectorate deals with planning appeals, national infrastructure planning applications, examinations of local plans and other planning-related and specialist casework in England
Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC)	A document that sets out how a project will engage and consult with the community, ensuring transparency and public involvement in decision-making
Statement of Response (SoR)	A document produced in response to the non-statutory public consultation. The document outlines the comments received during the public consultation, Thames Water's response to those comments and how the design has evolved based on comments received where possible and appropriate
Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP)	A statutory plan which sets out how a water company intends to provide a secure and sustainable supply of water to customers over at least a 25-year period

Acronyms

Acronym	Term
ADC	Auxiliary Drawdown Channel
BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain
DCO	Development Consent Order
EA	Environment Agency
FOC	Freight Operating Company
GARD	Group Against Reservoir Development
LPAs	Local Planning Authorities
MP	Member of Parliament
NSIP	Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project
OCC	Oxfordshire County Council
PINS	Planning Inspectorate
PRoW	Public Rights of Way
RAPID	Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development
ROC	Rail Operating Company
RSMH	Rail Siding and Material Handling
SESRO	South East Strategic Reservoir Option
SoCC	Statement of Community Consultation
SoR	Statement of Response
SRO	Strategic Resource Option
TOC	Train Operating Company
WRMP	Water Resources Management Plan
WRSE	Water Resources South East
WTW	Water Treatment Works

Executive summary

Recognising the potential scale of the water shortage crisis, the government, regulators and water companies are working together to plan new large-scale water storage and supply solutions. The proposed SESRO project is one of these. The reservoir would collect water from the River Thames during winter, when supply is abundant. It would then release water back into the river for re-abstraction downstream when river levels drop or demand increases.

The proposed reservoir would provide water to 15 million people and businesses across London and the South East, including customers served by Affinity Water and Southern Water. Beyond providing a resilient water supply for the South East, it would also present opportunities to create new habitats and increase biodiversity, while also offering new leisure and recreation facilities for local communities.

We intend to apply for a Development Consent Order (DCO) in 2026, seeking permission to construct, operate and maintain the proposed reservoir. If granted, construction is forecast to begin in 2029 with the reservoir scheduled to begin operating in 2040.

In the summer of 2024, we held a public non-statutory consultation to seek feedback on our interim masterplan - an overall spatial layout of the proposed reservoir and surroundings – and, specifically, several design options. Feedback was sought from anyone with an interest in the project.

In total, we received 1,598 responses which have been analysed by the independent research agency, Ipsos. Every response has been considered to inform and influence the evolution of the project.

Ipsos presented its analysis in a Feedback Report which is available on our website at www.thames-sro.co.uk/supportingdocuments.

As a result of the feedback we have received, a number of key changes have been made to the project (see section 5). Further design work will take place over the coming months and we will present a revised set of proposals when we launch a statutory public consultation on the project later this year.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this report

1.1.1. The purpose of this Statement of Response (SoR) is to share a summary of the wide range of feedback we received during the non-statutory public consultation in summer 2024 and to explain how we are using this feedback to inform the ongoing design of the project.

1.1.2. This report provides a summary of the feedback we received. A more detailed breakdown can be viewed in the Feedback Report prepared by Ipsos. This is available on our website at www.thames-sro.co.uk/supportingdocuments.

1.2 Structure of this report

1.2.1. The structure of this report is as follows:

- Section 1: Introduction (this section)
- Section 2: Overview of the non-statutory public consultation
- Section 3: Response to the consultation
- Section 4: Main themes raised through the consultation
- Section 5: Key project changes
- Section 6: Applying insights to future engagement

1.3 Background to the project

1.3.1. Through Water Resources South East (WRSE) we have been working with the five other water companies that supply drinking water across the South East to develop a regional plan that addresses the climate and environmental emergency facing our water environment and to secure the region's future water supplies.

1.3.2. Our Water Resources Management Plan 2024 (WRMP24) reflects this regional approach and sets out our strategy to secure a water supply for our growing population, protect against the growing risk of drought and water shortages, and improve the environment. Our revised WRMP, which was approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and has now been published, sets out a broad range of solutions to address the gap between the water available and the water needed. For further details, you can access the full document here: https://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/regulation/water-resources.

1.3.3. As part of the development of our WRMP24, we carried out extensive public consultation and engagement. We also considered feedback from regulators, stakeholders and our customers, and carried out additional modelling work. We concluded that a 150 million cubic metres (Mm^3) reservoir provides best value as

part of our plan for managing and developing our water resources in WRMP24.

1.3.4. The proposed reservoir would collect water from the River Thames during winter, storing it until needed – whether due to dry weather or increased demand. This would act as a long-term safeguard against drought for the next century for Thames Water, Southern Water and Affinity Water customers.

1.3.5. While the primary purpose of the proposed reservoir is to provide the vital water resources we need, it is also a unique opportunity to provide wider lasting benefits, from creating new landscapes with enhanced wildlife habitats, to activating new inclusive spaces for leisure and recreation.

1.3.6. We carried out our first project-specific, non-statutory public consultation in the summer of 2024. Comments were sought on the proposed design principles and interim masterplan which detailed the spatial layout of the proposed reservoir and associated infrastructure.

1.3.7. The development of our proposals for the new reservoir has been overseen by the Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development (RAPID), a consortium of water industry regulators. RAPID has implemented a 'gated' regulatory process to ensure that all new strategic water supply options are considered in a fair, consistent and transparent way and that our customers' money is spent wisely.

1.3.8. Figure 1-1 presents an indicative project timeline, outlining the planned stages and expected timeframes based on the current schedule.

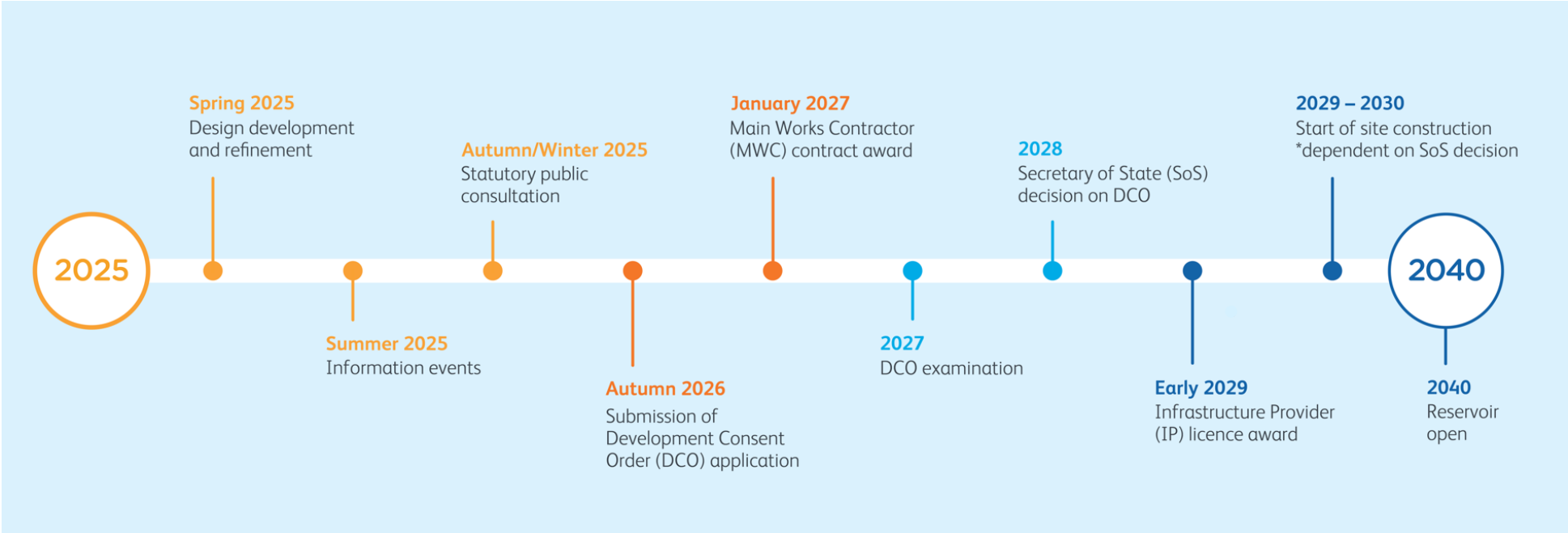

Figure 1-1: Indicative project timeline

1.4 About Thames Water

1.4.1. Water is essential for all our lives. It is essential for everything we do at home and at work. We rely on water to run our schools, hospitals and businesses. It is also essential for a healthy environment. We provide a reliable supply of safe drinking water to around 10 million household customers and 216,000 businesses in London and across the Thames Valley.

1.4.2. Many people think that there is plenty of water in the UK, but the South East of England is one of its driest regions and is classified by the Environment Agency (EA) as “seriously water stressed”. Our changing climate, the need to protect the environment, alongside accommodating future growth are all putting pressure on our water resources. Without action, we forecast a substantial shortfall of around one billion litres of water a day by 2050. The consequences of not having a secure water supply for our economy, society and the environment are huge.

1.4.3. There are no quick fix solutions. We need to plan ahead to make sure we use our available water resources wisely, modernise our infrastructure and invest in new sources of water to safeguard supplies and reduce the risk of us running dry during prolonged periods of drought.

1.4.4. Our WRMP24 sets out the challenge we face for water supply and the solutions to address the forecast shortfall of around one billion litres of water a day by 2050.The need for the project has been established through the WRMP. We carried out public consultation on our draft WRMP in 2023. In October 2024, following approval from the government, we published our WRMP24 which sets us on the path to secure a sustainable water future.

2 Overview of the non-statutory public consultation

2.1 Purpose and scope of the non-statutory public consultation

2.1.1. In the early stages of project design, we conducted a non-statutory public consultation from 5 June to 28 August 2024, gathering feedback from local landowners, residents, businesses, authorities, statutory bodies, and others impacted by or interested in the project. The 2024 public consultation mailing area covered all parishes within a 5km radius of the proposed site, along with selected addresses in Abingdon, Didcot and Wantage. The boundary is shown by the purple line in Figure 2-1.

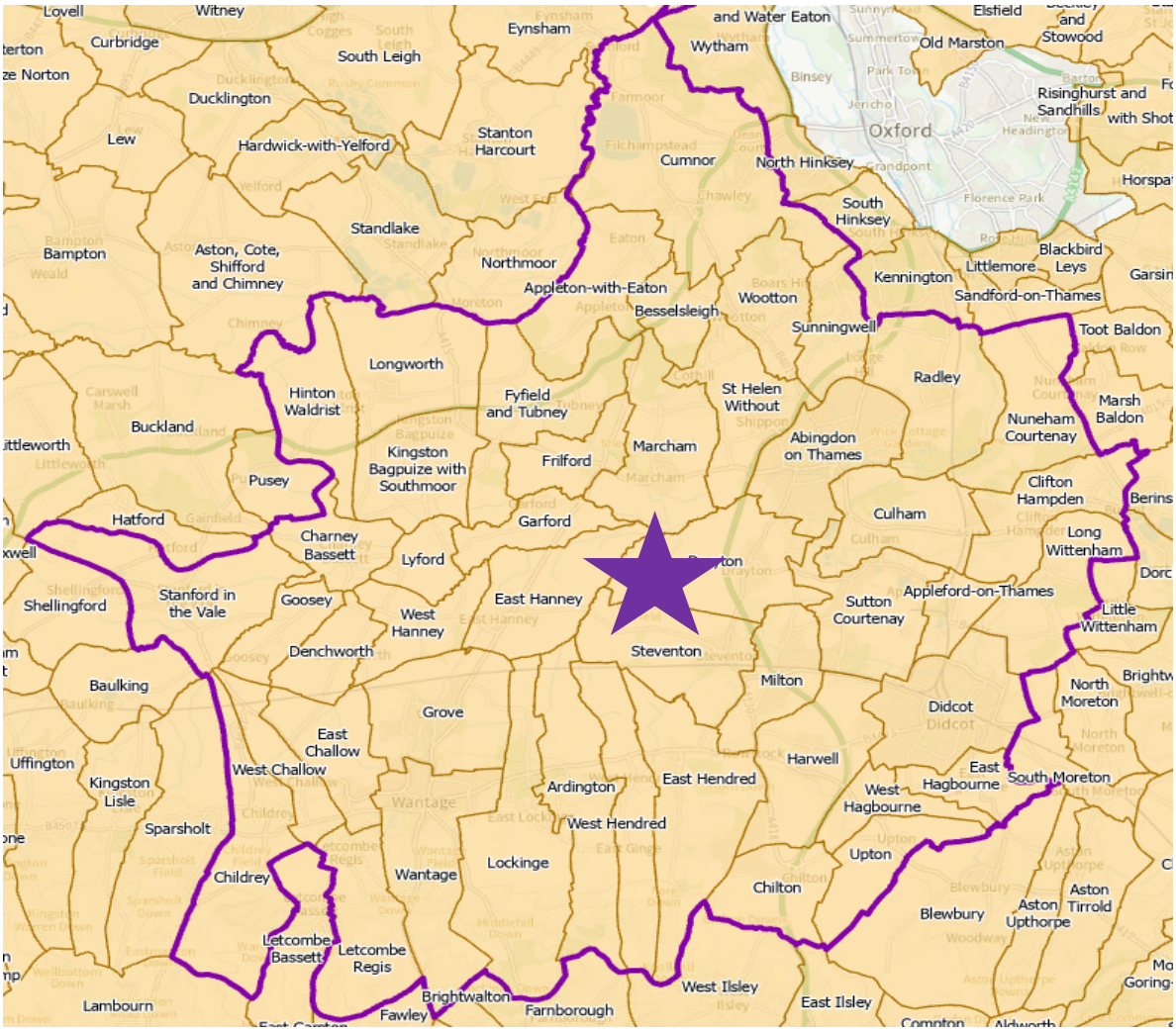

Figure 2-1: A map displaying the boundary for the mailing list used in the non-statutory consultation, with a star marking the approximate reservoir location

2.1.2. We commissioned the research agency Ipsos to receive, analyse and report on the feedback. In total, 1,598 consultees provided their feedback throughout the consultation period.

2.2 Promotion and engagement

2.2.1 The consultation was advertised using a variety of methods. A detailed description of how we promoted the consultation is provided in the Ipsos Feedback Report on our website at www.thames-sro.co.uk/supportingdocuments, with an overview provided in Figure 2-2.

Figure 2-2: How we advertised the 2024 Public Consultation

2.2.2 73,559 postcards were sent to all properties within a defined radius of the proposed reservoir boundary (addresses in any parish within 5km of any proposed infrastructure, see Figure 2-1).

2.2.3 Emails were sent to members of parliament (MPs), local authorities, county councillors, ward councillors and parish councils; other key stakeholders (including schools and colleges) and interested parties (e.g. technical liaison groups, youth and sports groups, environment groups and a local opposition group (Group Against Reservoir Development - GARD); those who had opted in for project updates; our regulators; prescribed consultees (including the EA, Health and Safety Executive and emergency services) and to statutory undertakers (e.g. utilities and telecoms companies).

2.2.4 Press articles were released to the Oxford Mail and posts were set up on social media (LinkedIn and Facebook).

2.2.5 We published our consultation materials on our website www.thames-sro.co.uk along with details about the public consultation, how to participate and the information events planned during the consultation period. Regional news teams attended our first consultation event in Sutton Courtenay and news pieces were subsequently aired on BBC South and ITV Meridian.

2.2.6 Consultees were able to provide feedback using an online survey, by email or post. Hard copies of the feedback questionnaire were also available on request or at consultation events. A freepost envelope was also provided.

2.3 Consultation events

2.3.1 Seven community information events were held at various locations near to the proposed reservoir site. Details of each event are set out in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1: Public information events

Date/Time	Location	Attendance
27th June 2024, 2pm-8pm	Sutton Courtenay Village Hall, OX14 4BB	142
29th June 2024, 10am-4pm	Royal British Legion, East Hanney, OX12 0JH	147
1st July 2024, 11am-5pm	Abingdon Guildhall, OX14 3JD	334
5th July 2024, 11am-5pm	Loyd Lindsay Rooms, Wantage, OX12 8PS	157
9th July 2024, 2pm-8pm	Didcot Civic Hall, OX11 7JN	190
15th July 2024, 2pm-8pm	Milton Hill House, Steventon, OX13 6AF	150
18th July 2024, 2pm-8pm	Marcham Centre, OX13 6TY	156

2.4 Consultation material

2.4.1 Detailed information about the project, including both technical and non-technical aspects, was made available on our website, as hard copies at events and on request. The details of the material and its purpose are outlined in Table 2-2.

Table 2-2: Consultation materials

Key Materials	Purpose
Summary brochure	Provides an overview of our consultation, with a summary of our proposals, where to find out more and how to take part in the consultation

Public consultation brochure (Technical brochure)	Outlines the technical aspects of the project, such as the design, construction and operation of the reservoir
Public consultation questionnaire	To enable feedback to be collected on the site options, our methodology and the project
Interim masterplan	Summarises the project's proposed objectives, design, environmental impact, community engagement and regulatory steps to ensure a sustainable water supply for the South East region
Options Appraisals	**Purpose**
Options appraisal – Context and methodology report	Evaluates the options associated with the overarching project concept, vision and masterplan
Options appraisal – Rail siding and materials handling area report	Evaluates the infrastructure options associated with the temporary rail sidings and materials handling area
Options appraisal – Access and diversion roads report	Evaluates the infrastructure options associated with the access and diversion roads
Options appraisal – Connectivity to the River Thames report	Evaluates the infrastructure options for the project's connectivity to the River Thames
Options appraisal – Thames to Southern Transfer SRO, WTW site identification report	Evaluates the infrastructure options associated with the water treatment works for the Thames to Southern Transfer
Factsheets	**Purpose**
Development Consent Order Factsheet	Supporting information on how we will seek consent to build and operate the project
Ground Investigations and Clay Compaction Trial Factsheet	Supporting information on early survey work using ground investigations and clay compaction trials
Reservoir Safety and Operation Factsheet	Supporting information on how we will safely design and operate the project
The Thames to Southern Transfer Factsheet	Supporting information on the water treatment works and the Thames to Southern Transfer
Environmental Impact Assessment Factsheet	Supporting information on the Environmental Impact Assessment
Flood Management Factsheet	Supporting information on potential flood risk and flood management

Land and Property Factsheet	Supporting information for landowners in relation to the project
Other	**Purpose**
Map book	Maps showing each of the site options during and after construction
Design principles	Introduces the project design vision and describes the Draft Design Principles that will underpin the design

3 Response to consultation

3.1 Responses

3.1.1 In total, 1,598 consultees provided their feedback throughout the consultation period.

3.1.2 Thames Water commissioned the independent research agency Ipsos to receive, analyse and report on the feedback received. The full feedback analysis can be found on our website https://thames-sro.co.uk/document-library/.

3.1.3 The infographic below provides a summary of the consultation responses.

Figure 3-1: Summary of consultation responses

4 Main themes raised through consultation

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 This section provides an overview of the main themes in the feedback received during the 2024 non-statutory public consultation. This includes recurring topics, concerns, and suggestions raised by participants. Feedback was received regarding both the specific site options and the potential impacts of the project's construction and operations on local communities and those who use the area.

4.1.2 We also received feedback more broadly about Thames Water such as the need for the project, water resource planning, investigations into alternatives and a lack of trust in Thames Water and regulators that the project would be properly regulated, operated or monitored.

4.1.3 We acknowledge the concerns and questions expressed regarding the justification for the project. The need for the project is defined through our WRMP. Every water company must prepare and maintain a WRMP. This plan is updated every five years and sets out how the company will achieve a secure supply of water for our customers whilst protecting the environment. The necessity of the project has been established within the WRMP through a detailed statutory process including optioneering, feasibility studies, modelling, evaluations and public consultation and has been approved by the government. Further information and reports about the WRMP, including details of all options and alternatives considered through the water resources planning process, can be found on our website at: https://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/regulation/water-resources.

4.1.4 Feedback from several respondents emphasised a need for greater detail on the project, particularly concerning its phasing, the Draft Design Principles and the preferred options set out by Thames Water. As the project remains in the early stages of development, the consultation was based on the information available at that time. We are dedicated to maintaining an open and transparent approach and will continue to share updates as new details are developed throughout the design, assessment and planning phases and through to our DCO application.

4.1.5 The feedback we received regarding the project and the information provided during the consultation will also shape how we approach future engagement and consultations. The responses reflect a clear interest in greater technical detail about the project. Our commitment is to offer precise, accessible and timely updates to enable stakeholders to better understand the project's design, benefits and potential impacts as it develops. This approach will also ensure the project is open to appropriate examination within the statutory framework of the planning process.

4.1.6 We have organised a series of public information events scheduled to take place throughout summer 2025. These events will provide an opportunity,

ahead of statutory consultation later in 2025, to share updates on the latest project design and highlight the significant developments and changes implemented since the non-statutory public consultation held last year.

4.2 Key project themes

Theme 1: Emerging options

Background

4.2.1 We have developed a consistent methodology for identification and assessment of site options for infrastructure associated with the reservoir, that considers engineering, environmental, land and planning issues to identify our preferred options. More detail about how we carried out our optioneering, the options appraisal context and methodology report is available on our website via thames-sro.co.uk/SESRO.

4.2.2 To deliver an operational reservoir at this site, we have identified a number of options for the associated infrastructure including:

- A location for the construction of a temporary rail siding
- New roads, including an access road and diversion of the existing road between East Hanney and Steventon
- A location for a water treatment works
- Connection to the River Thames

Consultation question

4.2.3 As part of the consultation, we asked: do you have any comments on the process we undertook to develop our preferred options for the infrastructure associated with the reservoir?

Representations and feedback

4.2.4 We received a total of 379 comments from consultees, including feedback from 362 members of the public and 17 organisations and representative groups.

4.2.5 Among the responses, 26 consultees provided positive or receptive comments regarding the process Thames Water has taken to develop preferred options for the infrastructure associated with the reservoir. These comments indicated that the process was well-thought-out, that there was good information and details provided, that local people and communities had been adequately consulted and that the process was satisfactory and fair.

4.2.6 However, 351 consultees raised concerns about the process. Key comments included how the process was planned and thought through, a lack of consideration for local people and communities, inadequate consultation with

local people and communities and the perception that public opinion had not been fully considered.

4.2.7 Other concerns, although mentioned less frequently, included a lack of credible or viable options, difficulty in understanding the process, concerns about flood risk not being fully accounted for and perceptions of bias or unreliability in the process.

4.2.8 Requests were made for environmental surveys to assess impacts and benefits, the identification of site constraints and opportunities before the design stages and further discussion on how flood risk modelling informed the various options presented in the consultation. Additionally, there were suggestions that the consultation process missed important steps, including a social value assessment of the canal reconstruction.

Our consideration of the feedback

4.2.9 Thames Water is fully committed to fostering meaningful engagement with communities and stakeholders throughout the project's development. All feedback has been carefully considered, and we continue to engage with statutory consultees to support the technical evolution of the design. The wider community has been engaged through a spring update programme in April 2025 which involved email updates and a brochure. Further engagement with drop-in events and updates is planned for summer 2025. Formal consultation feedback will also be sought in response to our statutory consultation later in 2025.

4.2.10 Environmental surveys are ongoing and will commence in new areas as land becomes available to access. The insights gained from these surveys will play a crucial role in shaping the design development, ensuring that environmental considerations are fully integrated into the process.

4.2.11 Flood risk modelling plays a crucial role in evaluating the current risk of flooding. During the appraisal of the site options for the infrastructure associated with the reservoir prior to the non-statutory consultation, we conducted impact assessments using a flood model. Planning policy requires the proposed design to take into account flood risk, with measures put forward to ensure that the development does not increase flood risk elsewhere. Wherever feasible, we also aim to further reduce flood risk to deliver added benefits. The flood model will continue to be refined throughout the design phase.

4.2.12 We recognise the level of community interest in the canal. To support engagement with the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust (W&BCT), work is being undertaken into the canal and the potential benefits the project could deliver.

4.2.13 With regard to our appraisal methodology, we have also introduced a more detailed appraisal scale and standardised this across all of our study appraisals. This new scale is now reflected in our RAG rating, providing additional clarity and precision.

Theme 2: Rail links to site

Background

4.2.14 The reservoir's construction would require materials such as stone, sand and gravel, which we propose would be transported via a dedicated rail siding to minimise road traffic. A Rail Siding and Material Handling (RSMH) facility would be established, incorporating a materials handling area where supplies may be off-loaded from trains and stored until required for construction.

4.2.15 Following an extensive appraisal of potential locations, a site approximately 1km south of East Hanney and 900m southwest of the reservoir was identified as the preferred rail siding option. This site minimises environmental impact, aligns with signalling requirements and ensures cost efficiency.

Consultation question

4.2.16 As part of the consultation, we asked: we are considering options for the rail links to the site. Our preferred option is Option 5. Do you have any comments on these plans?

Representations and feedback

4.2.17 We received 397 comments from consultees, including 378 members of the public and 19 organisations or groups.

4.2.18 63 consultees supported Option 5, citing its practicality, necessity and thoughtful planning, though some conditional support depended on mitigating biodiversity impacts.

4.2.19 However, 40 consultees raised specific concerns about Option 5 and 199 opposed any rail link. Common criticisms included insufficient detail in the proposals, perceptions of poor planning, financial concerns, potential disruption to communities and environmental impacts such as harm to biodiversity and noise pollution.

4.2.20 Concerns were also raised regarding the impact on local rail operations and increased congestion. Some consultees felt unable to assess the proposals fully due to limited details on aspects such as train tonnage and frequency. Suggestions for improvement included redeveloping Wantage and Grove station, reopening nearby rail lines and stations (e.g. Abingdon), building new stations in areas like East Hanney and constructing rail links away from roads. Other suggestions included using electric or hydrogen trains, pollution prevention measures and ensuring benefits for local communities.

Our consideration of the feedback

4.2.21 The project remains committed to sustainability and we will work with Freight

Operating Companies (FOCs) to identify the most viable rail transport approach within operational constraints. This is only one component of the wider construction logistics strategy which is being developed to balance transport of materials by road and rail. Additionally, the RSMH facility is being developed in coordination with our masterplanning, environmental and ecology teams to minimise the impacts identified in the consultation wherever feasible.

4.2.22 Concerns regarding local rail operations and network congestion have been considered through an initial timetable capacity exercise. This concluded that no additional train paths are available for travel east from the RSMH as all are fully utilised or reserved by Train and Freight Operating Companies (TOC and FOC). The updated assessment is therefore considering different potential exit routes for trains (including to the west). This would provide greater operational flexibility for the project as trains will not need to travel to Didcot to turn around and can, instead, travel west immediately to Avonmouth. The project would look to utilise three daily freight trains with 20 wagons each, both inbound and outbound, subject to future collaboration with a FOC(s).

4.2.23 While suggestions for reopening rail lines are not included in this project, we acknowledge the interest and are engaging with local councils and Network Rail to discuss nearby rail schemes, including the potential for a future Wantage and Grove station, so as to not preclude potential further development of those schemes. While there are no current plans to reuse railway infrastructure after construction, we are in discussions to see if there is any appetite for infrastructure to be left in place for future use. These discussions exclude those assets that will be owned and operated by Network Rail.

Next steps

4.2.24 While the project intends to proceed with the preferred Option 5, with updates to the internal site layout and mainline connection, alternatives are still being investigated as part of an optioneering exercise. These alternative layouts also include updates to the design of the RSMH facility to allow the import and export of materials via train, as the most sustainable mode of transport for removal of materials.

4.2.25 The next steps for rail links design involve exploring an alternative site configuration that enables trains to exit the facility to the east and west avoiding the need for turnarounds at Didcot.

4.2.26 Engagement with the FOCs, material suppliers and National Rail will continue to ensure alignment on potential rail network considerations.

4.2.27 Additionally, updates to stockpile sizes, vehicle movement requirements and the RSMH facility layout will progress, based on the material quantities required for the reservoir's construction.

Theme 3: Road appraisal

Background

4.2.28 Feedback was sought regarding plans for a new construction access road, which would also serve as the access road to the site once the project is complete, and for the replacement of the road connecting East Hanney and Steventon, both of which are required for the project.

4.2.29 The construction access road is intended to serve as a temporary route for construction traffic and then as a permanent access road in the future for maintenance and public access. Its design is not expected to preclude any potential development of infrastructure for the Abingdon Flood Alleviation Scheme which would be delivered by the Environment Agency. Of the four proposed options, the preferred option is stated as Option B, as it is shorter, situated closest to the A34, and minimises land use and visual impact while conforming to local plans and potential future developments.

4.2.30 The Steventon to East Hanney road diversion is necessary as the project's footprint disrupts the existing road. The preferred option is stated as Option A, which retains a direct link between the villages, preserves the bus route through Steventon and requires fewer alterations to utilities while having a reduced visual impact compared to the alternative routes.

Consultation question

4.2.31 As part of the consultation, we asked two questions:

4.2.32 We are proposing to build a new access road to the site which will also be used as an access road during construction. Once the reservoir is built the road could be used as the access for visitors for recreational use. Our preferred option is Option B. Do you have any comments on these plans?

4.2.33 Several routes have been considered to replace the existing road between East Hanney and Steventon. Our preferred option is Option A. Do you have any comments on these plans?

Representations and feedback

4.2.34 Feedback on the construction access road reflected mixed opinions, with both support and concerns expressed. Option B, connecting to the A415 near the Marcham Interchange, was supported by 65 consultees for its alignment with planned developments and potential to enhance recreational opportunities. Prioritising active travel emerged strongly in feedback with 78 consultees valuing measures that promote sustainable transport options. However, some consultees, including 53 individuals, expressed concerns about potential increases in congestion, particularly on the A34 and in Marcham. Additionally, 40 consultees highlighted the need for clearer details and communication about

the plans to address these issues effectively.

4.2.35 The proposed Steventon to East Hanney road diversion also received varied responses. Option A, following the southern reservoir embankment, was generally preferred by 48 consultees for its potential to minimise disruption and maintain connectivity. However, 27 consultees raised concerns about the impact of construction traffic, while 32 emphasised the importance of providing additional details about the plans. Suggestions for the diversion included incorporating features to support active travel, such as dedicated footways and cycleways, with 20 consultees highlighting the need to ensure safety for pedestrians and cyclists. A further 18 consultees called for effective traffic management measures to minimise disruption during construction.

4.2.36 Overall, the feedback highlighted the importance of balancing development needs with local priorities, focusing on walking, cycling and wheeling routes, community impact and thorough planning to address concerns and refine proposals.

Our consideration of the feedback

4.2.37 In response to feedback from the non-statutory public consultation, the design team is considering comments regarding both the construction access road and the Steventon to East Hanney road diversion. As part of the development of the construction access road, efforts are also underway to utilise this road to accommodate a cycle and footway which would be constructed alongside, but separate from, the main carriageway for safety reasons. This road will be constructed before the existing road is closed and demolished to ensure connectivity is not disrupted. An internal network of Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) is being designed with user safety at its core, to better accommodate active travel users (e.g., pedestrians and cyclists) both on and through the site linking to the external network.

4.2.38 A traffic forecast assessment is also being carried out to evaluate the impact of construction activities on the current highway network. This will help determine whether enhancements are required both on-site and off-site. Additionally, the design team is working closely with stakeholders including Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), Sustrans and others to gather their input early in the process, ensuring that views on sustainable travel are well understood before the statutory consultation.

Next steps

4.2.39 The project is proceeding with Option B for the construction access road. Temporary access will be established from Marcham Road (A415) to facilitate the construction of the new road into the site. This new site access road would be integrated to serve as the primary access route during construction.

4.2.40 Additionally, to make sure there is enough space for construction, a new layout has been proposed for the A415/Dalton roundabout to ensure it has sufficient

capacity to cater for both the planned development at Dalton Barracks and the main access for SESRO. This roundabout would link the project's main access to the A415 road. The new roundabout would be constructed offline (adjacent to the Marcham Road to simplify construction and safety). Once complete, the roundabout will be connected to the Marcham Road by realignment of the road.

4.2.41 To support this work, a temporary site would be set up next to the A415 to serve as a base for workers, with welfare facilities and offices. This site will also be used as a storage compound to facilitate work on any necessary improvements to the A34 which are required to ensure a smooth connection between the new construction access road and the main site. Once the roundabout is complete, the construction access road would extend south to the project site, where the main base for construction will be set up. Additionally, there may be a need to widen the A415 between the Marcham Interchange and the new roundabout to accommodate traffic. Further assessments are being undertaken on the impacts of the construction access road on the A34, A415 and access arrangements at Dalton Barracks. Initial discussions with the developers at Dalton Barracks have identified a land package which could be used for a combined junction and A415 improvements.

4.2.42 The project is moving forward with Option A for the Steventon to East Hanney road diversion, running south of Steventon and north of the railway line. This option was chosen over Option B for its lower carbon footprint, better environmental performance and advantages in terms of existing land use in planning terms and cost.

Theme 4: Water Treatment Works

Background

4.2.43 During the consultation, feedback was gathered on the proposed location for a Water Treatment Works (WTW) to support the Thames to Southern Transfer project. The WTW is planned to treat 120 megalitres of water per day, requiring five to six hectares of land, with pipelines connecting it to the reservoir and distribution network.

4.2.44 The WTW is within the reservoir site because it needs to be near the reservoir for efficient water transfer and treatment. Its location helps reduce the need for long pipelines, ensures reliable treatment and meets water quality requirements. Placing the WTW within the reservoir site also simplifies land use and lowers environmental impact.

4.2.45 An assessment was carried out, starting with a constraints mapping exercise to rule out unsuitable locations. From eight potential areas, six were excluded due to challenges such as land use and possible impacts on the reservoir. The remaining two locations were then examined. Option 2 benefits from shorter pipeline lengths and less environmental impact while Option 4 offers a larger construction area and simpler logistics but may need more extensive landscaping, due to its elevation, compared to Option 2.

Consultation question

4.2.46 As part of the consultation, we asked: we need to identify a location for a proposed Water Treatment Works, which is currently proposed to be consented, built and operated by Southern Water. Our preferred options for the location of the Water Treatment Works are Option 2 and Option 4. Do you have any comments on these plans?

Representations and feedback

4.2.47 The proposed WTW received a variety of responses from consultees, reflecting a combination of support and concerns. Option 2 was supported by 23 consultees for its proximity to existing infrastructure whilst Option 4 had 5 supportive comments, with consultees appreciating its placement away from the reservoir and leisure areas. Despite these positives, both options drew attention to potential environmental impacts, particularly on biodiversity and visual aesthetics.

4.2.48 145 consultees expressed broader opposition to the WTW, questioning its necessity and raising concerns about its environmental impact and closeness to residential areas. Suggestions included relocating the WTW further from homes, prioritising environmental protection and providing clearer and more detailed information. The feedback emphasised the need for careful consideration of environmental and community concerns, while ensuring that the plans are communicated clearly and align with broader local needs.

Our consideration of the feedback

4.2.49 Following consultation feedback, we carried out further analysis to determine the best location for the WTW. Both Option 2 and Option 4 had advantages, but concerns about environmental impact, proximity to homes and disruption to proposed leisure areas guided the assessment. A second review considered these factors alongside the stakeholder feedback.

Next steps

4.2.50 An options criteria assessment of these two potential locations reviewed factors such as environment, construction logistics and engineering alongside the stakeholder feedback. Option 4 emerged as the preferred site for the WTW and will be taken forward by the project. It offers a more suitable location for construction, minimises programme risks and aligns well with the broader site vision. It also reduces disruption to proposed recreational areas blending better with the surroundings and providing a more coherent visitor experience. In contrast, Option 2 had a number of limitations, including restricted space and potential co-location construction issues with nearby infrastructure such as the pumping station, tunnel and construction compounds, making it a less viable choice.

4.2.51 To address concerns raised at the 2024 consultation, work is ongoing to site the WTW on the lower part of the site at the Option 4 location, using the natural landscape to help screen it from view. We are also developing a screening strategy creating bunding and a woodland setting to minimise its visual impact.

4.2.52 Option 4's generous size provides greater flexibility, accommodating both current needs and potential future expansion. Its location, set apart from key operational and recreational zones, helps mitigate disruptions and so would enhance the visitor experience. Ultimately, Option 4 delivers a practical, forward-thinking solution that supports the long-term objectives of the project.

4.2.53 We have agreed with Southern Water that, because of the proximity of the proposed new water treatment works to the reservoir itself, we'll seek the consent for it as part of the DCO application for this project. This is a change from what we've previously said, but we believe that by doing this, we can help ensure that the reservoir and the water treatment works are planned in an integrated and complimentary way.

Theme 5: Connectivity to the River Thames

Background

4.2.54 The consultation invited comments on how best to connect the reservoir to the River Thames, considering two key aspects: the intake/outfall structure, and the emergency discharge system.

4.2.55 The intake/outfall structure will abstract water from the River Thames (when water levels are high) to fill the reservoir and return it to the river during dry periods to support downstream supply. Eight options were reviewed, considering environmental impacts, construction feasibility and proximity to the reservoir. Option B was the preferred solution, located near the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust Inlet. It was chosen for its simpler design, shorter tunnels and reduced impact on heritage sites.

4.2.56 Emergency discharge infrastructure, needed to lower the reservoir's water level in emergencies, was also assessed. Of the three options considered, Option C – a tunnel-only design – was identified as the most practical. This avoids complex road crossings, limits environmental disruption and uses less land at the surface compared to other options.

Consultation question

4.2.57 As part of the consultation, we asked two questions:

4.2.58 We are proposing Option B as our preferred option for our intake/outfall structure. Do you have any comments on these plans?

4.2.59 We have considered several options for the Emergency Discharge and Option C is our preferred option. Do you have any comments on these plans?

Representations and feedback

4.2.60 For the intake/outfall structure, Option B received support from 78 consultees, who appreciated its simplicity, shorter tunnel length and reduced impact on heritage sites. Some also highlighted potential benefits for local wildlife and communities.

4.2.61 However, 40 consultees raised concerns, including recreational impacts, water quality and perceived inflexibility. A wider group of 198 consultees voiced opposition to the intake/outfall plans in general, often citing a lack of information and environmental risks. The tunnel option for the outfall was the preferred approach for many respondents.

4.2.62 On the emergency discharge infrastructure, 158 consultees expressed support for Option B, highlighting its alignment with potential canal restoration, opportunities to enhance biodiversity and ability to promote recreation through walking and cycling routes. It was widely viewed as a sustainable, long-term solution with meaningful community and environmental benefits. Option C, while Thames Water's preferred option, prompted concerns from 309 consultees, including considerations around safety, structural challenges and environmental impacts. Some consultees suggested that the tunnel in Option C could be reserved for normal water transfers, with an additional open channel providing a suitable auxiliary solution for emergency drawdown. A petition signed by 68 members of the public further reflected support for an open channel option (Option B) as an alternative to the proposed tunnel approach.

4.2.63 Suggestions across both areas highlighted the importance of integrating canal links, which many respondents felt could enhance environmental and community benefits through improved biodiversity and opportunities for active travel such as walking and cycling.

Our consideration of the feedback

4.2.64 In considering the intake/outfall structure, further analysis was undertaken to assess potential alternatives while addressing key concerns raised. Building on previous assessments, site options were re-evaluated with a more detailed focus on factors such as flood resilience and environmental impact.

4.2.65 For the emergency discharge system, technical evaluations have reaffirmed that the tunnel-based approach (Option C at non-statutory consultation) offers the most efficient and secure solution. While the open-channel alternatives (Option B at non-statutory consultation) presented potential benefits, the tunnel option provides greater reliability, minimises land requirements and ensures safe water conveyance under emergency conditions. The ongoing hydraulic modelling will further refine the approach, ensuring it is implemented in the most effective manner.

4.2.66 A new potential improvement has been evaluated on the east bank of the River Thames, directly opposite the preferred location of the intake/outfall structure.

We are considering a flood conveyance ridge in this location which would help mitigate flood risk with minimal environmental impact. The project team continues to examine all possibilities, with further assessments underway to confirm the most suitable solution.

Next steps

4.2.67 Although alternative locations were reviewed for the intake/outfall structure, Option B remains the preferred choice. Option B is within the floodplain, so further river modelling is being carried out to confirm its viability and explore measures to improve its suitability for the floodplain, optimise flood management measures and enhance long-term resilience.

4.2.68 Alternative siting options continue to be evaluated, with a focus on environmental considerations and planning requirements. These assessments will ensure that the final location is both practical and resilient, aligning with operational and regulatory needs.

4.2.69 For the emergency discharge system, the tunnel-only approach (Option C) remains the preferred solution due to its hydraulic efficiency and controlled water conveyance. While an open-channel transfer received significant support for its potential environmental and recreational benefits, engineering assessments confirmed that a tunnel-based system offers a more reliable and contained method for emergency drawdown. Hydraulic modelling continues to assess flow management and river impact to refine operational measures for safe and effective discharge control.

4.2.70 For the emergency discharge system, ongoing hydraulic modelling is being conducted to identify suitable mitigation measures for potential impacts on the river and its banks. These investigations will help ensure that the final approach is robust, secure, and optimised for long-term functionality.

Theme 6: Our Draft Design Principles

Background

4.2.71 Draft Design Principles for the reservoir site were presented during the consultation, and feedback was invited on the strategy and application. These principles aim to ensure the reservoir delivers a secure water supply while creating valuable spaces for nature and recreation.

4.2.72 Developed to align with national guidelines and the specific needs of the project, the principles focus on safety, people and integration with the local environment. They prioritise safe construction and operation, reducing carbon emissions, reusing materials and designing for climate resilience. The principles also promote inclusive recreational spaces, habitat protection, and sensitive integration into the surrounding landscape, with enhancements to green infrastructure.

4.2.73 In addition to overarching principles, site-specific ones have been developed for the project's masterplan zones to ensure the vision is implemented effectively. Further information is available in the design principles report, which can be found at: https://thames-sro.co.uk/document-library/.

Consultation question

4.2.74 As part of the consultation, we asked: we have presented our Draft Design Principles for the SESRO masterplan. Do you have any comments on our Draft Design Principles?

Representations and feedback

4.2.75 The consultation on the Draft Design Principles for the proposed reservoir received feedback from 387 consultees. Positive comments came from 61 consultees, who praised the principles for their focus on environment, safety, and climate. They were seen as thoughtful, well-planned and effective in addressing future water supply needs.

4.2.76 On the other hand, 312 consultees raised concerns, however these were related to the design of the project and not directly in relation to specific Draft Design Principles. For example, some felt the plans needed more detail, particularly on safety, flood risks and the impact on local communities. There were also questions around embankment design, biodiversity and how water quality would be managed.

4.2.77 Suggestions from 137 consultees regarding design included avoiding tree planting on embankments, conducting larger-scale testing, and ensuring the plans protect biodiversity and promote sustainability. Others emphasised improving recreational opportunities and refining the canal corridor to better integrate with local watercourses and the environment.

Our consideration of the feedback

4.2.78 The evolution of the design principles has considered the concerns raised during consultation, with these concerns being additionally responded to through the design development of the project to add more detail. Safety remains a top priority, and the project follows strict regulations, including pursuant to the Reservoirs Act 1975, The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 and The Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

4.2.79 The environmental concerns raised by consultees are to be addressed through the design of the project and through the application of The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, which require the project to undergo an Environmental Impact Assessment, to ensure that environmental impacts are considered. A Preliminary Environmental Information Report will be published as part of the statutory consultation, which

will provide initial information about the project's environmental impact. An Environmental Statement will accompany the DCO application.

4.2.80 The concerns regarding the design of the project raised by 312 consultees have been addressed through the evolution of the masterplan, which is covered by Theme 7: Our interim masterplan.

Next steps

4.2.81 The Design Principles are evolving, and it is the intention to develop a consolidated set of Overarching Design Principles. We will preserve the core intent, utilising language from the existing set and merging overlapping principles into broader, more inclusive statements.

4.2.82 We will provide a clear narrative on how the Design Principles are to be secured by the DCO through requirements, conditions, management plans or other certified documents. We are also ensuring that they are fully accessible for the statutory consultation.

4.2.83 The Design Principles support the design of the project and will ensure a good design outcome is achieved in the detailed design of the project. It is the intention that the draft Overarching Design Principles set our design ethos and will be used to help develop more specific Design Principles, some of these will be project-wide and some will relate to the component parts of the Project.

4.2.84 While much of the feedback related to the design of the project, rather than the design principles themselves, feedback has been utilised in their evolution. Some consultees told us that the design principles were well thought out and planned. They felt the principles would help secure future water supplies and support drought planning and preparedness. Based on this feedback, we are developing them further as we refine our masterplan for the project, integrating advice from the Design Council, the UK's national strategic advisor for design.

Theme 7: Our interim masterplan

Background

4.2.85 An indicative masterplan for the proposed reservoir was developed in 2022, the aim of which was to balance engineering, environmental and recreational needs. This evolved into the interim masterplan, focusing on integrating the reservoir into the landscape while benefiting nature and communities. Guided by the project's Design Vision and Draft Design Principles and input from stakeholders and local authorities, the masterplan seeks to avoid and mitigate adverse impacts on the environment and so also supports environmental impact assessments.

4.2.86 The masterplan sets out seven zones, each detailing features such as watercourse diversions, seasonal wetlands (if water levels allow), paths and operational facilities:

- Zone 1: Seasonal wetlands, ponds, and restored watercourses, with paths for wildlife viewing
- Zone 2: Main site access, with paths, hedgerows and a reserved area for a potential water treatment works
- Zone 3: Recreation hub with lakes, trails, visitor facilities and picnic areas
- Zone 4: Natural leisure spaces with wetlands, woodland and habitat restoration
- Zone 5: Road diversion with footways, cycleways, wetlands and woodland planting
- Zone 6: The reservoir itself, featuring embankments, lagoons, floating islands and paths with scenic viewpoints
- Zone 7: A tunnel linking the reservoir to the River Thames, with intake/outfall structures and emergency drawdown systems

4.2.87 Full details are available in our map book at: https://thames-sro.co.uk/document-library/.

Consultation question

4.2.88 As part of the consultation, we asked: our interim masterplan is an overall spatial layout of the proposed reservoir site, including wetlands for capturing flood water and introducing diverse ecology, operational areas, such as for treating water or transferring it to and from the reservoir, amenity areas, public access, woodlands, footpaths and others. Do you have any comments on our interim masterplan?

Representations and feedback

4.2.89 Reactions to the interim masterplan were mixed, with 573 consultees sharing their views. Among the 107 supportive responses, many appreciated the focus on biodiversity improvements, such as the creation of wetlands and the potential for enhanced recreational opportunities.

4.2.90 Some highlighted the plan's thoroughness, while 23 consultees supported it on the condition that specific benefits, like better transport links and minimal construction impacts, were delivered.

4.2.91 Concerns were raised by 372 consultees, focusing on environmental issues such as potential harm to wildlife and habitats, safety risks and transport challenges affecting public access and infrastructure. Several consultees felt the plan lacked sufficient detail, while others saw missed opportunities, including stronger connections to nearby villages and the restoration of the canal.

4.2.92 Other suggestions from 244 consultees included recommendations for greener practices, improved recreational facilities and clearer approaches to safety and environmental concerns. Many emphasised the need for the plan to remain

flexible and responsive to ongoing assessments, while also fostering trust and transparency with local communities.

Our consideration of the feedback

4.2.93 Positive responses, particularly those recognising biodiversity improvements and recreational opportunities, have been further developed in the design of features such as lakes and community spaces. We are exploring opportunities to potentially allow early access during the construction phase to areas such as seasonal wetlands to allow local people to start enjoying the site earlier.

4.2.94 Concerns around environmental impacts, safety and transport (e.g., traffic and congestion) have been carefully considered with design development ensuring risks to wildlife and habitats are minimised and there is a focus on public safety.

4.2.95 Suggestions for clearer details in specific areas, such as stronger links to nearby villages and the canal restoration, are being considered in the evolving plan and more detail will be provided in the statutory consultation later in the year. As an example of this work, we are exploring the PRoW network planned for the site to increase connectivity between villages.

4.2.96 To remain responsive to community needs, the masterplan is adaptable and will continue to evolve until our DCO application.

Next steps

4.2.97 The masterplan has been updated to ensure the reservoir is better integrated into its surroundings while meeting the vital need for water supply. A key change is the shift from a zonal approach to a more unified, holistic site-wide strategy, allowing for better coordination between operational requirements and environmental enhancements. For example, instead of viewing how people might enjoy one aspect of the site, we are looking at the complete visitor experience.

4.2.98 The masterplan balances the reservoir's function with the creation of parks, seasonal wetlands and recreational facilities, including a visitor centre, café and water sports centre. It also considers the design of buildings, using materials that help them blend into the landscape.

4.2.99 The site would include extensive walking and cycling routes and well-planned roads to simplify access for visitors and provide accessibility not only on the site itself but also through the site, connecting to other routes.

4.2.100 Through a combination of technical studies, site surveys and comprehensive community and stakeholder engagement, we are gathering information and insights that will shape the masterplan design for the DCO application.

4.2.101 We are working with the Design Council as we develop our masterplan for the project. This relationship provides independent expert challenge on how we

develop the masterplan and project design helping to ensure the design is as good as possible. We are also taking into account the National Infrastructure Commission's four principles of climate, people, places and value.

4.2.102 Ongoing work to understand the needs and priorities of local communities – alongside engagement with stakeholders, input from the Design Council, and feedback to the statutory public consultation later in 2025 – will ensure the project delivers positive benefits for local communities and nature, while also providing a secure and sustainable water supply for future generations.

Theme 8: Additional questions

4.2.103 As part of the consultation, we asked: do you have any other comments relating to the proposals for SESRO at this stage in the process?

4.2.104 The Equality Act 2010 protects people against discrimination based on nine protected characteristics. These are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Please explain if you think our proposals will discriminate against people with protected characteristics.

Representations and feedback

4.2.105 When asked for additional comments, 848 consultees responded, with 151 sharing positive views and 623 expressing concerns. Supportive feedback emphasised the project's potential to address future water needs, improve biodiversity and to create opportunities for recreation and community benefits. Some support was offered on the condition that environmental protections and community priorities were met.

4.2.106 Concerns focused on doubts about the project's necessity and management, as well as its potential impact on the environment and local communities, including disruption and visual changes. Many consultees suggested that clearer communication and greater transparency could help alleviate these concerns. Common suggestions included exploring alternative solutions, prioritising sustainability and ensuring robust environmental and safety measures, while making efforts to reduce disruption and build trust with stakeholders.

4.2.107 When asked if the proposals might discriminate against people with protected characteristics, 153 consultees provided feedback. Of these, 79 felt the proposals would not discriminate and were inclusive and fair.

4.2.108 However, some consultees raised concerns about potential discrimination. Key points included accessibility for people with disabilities, with suggestions such as wheelchair-friendly paths, suitable surfaces and water access. Other comments highlighted the importance of considering the needs of older people, those on low incomes, and individuals who might find the consultation materials difficult to engage with. A few respondents also mentioned the importance of

ensuring recreational access remained inclusive and implementing safety measures to create a welcoming environment for everyone.

Our consideration of the feedback

4.2.109 Concerns around environmental impacts, disruption and transparency have been noted, and efforts are being made to prioritise clear communication, minimise disruption, and strengthen environmental and safety measures. As addressed elsewhere in this document, we are also exploring sustainable practices and alternative solutions to address these issues, ensuring that the project evolves to meet community needs and builds trust with stakeholders.

4.2.110 We acknowledge the feedback on potential discrimination and we are committed to ensuring that the project is inclusive and accessible to all. Inclusive access is a fundamental legislative requirement that would be implemented throughout the site, ensuring it accommodates diverse needs and circumstances. While some areas may have restrictions due to their specific activities or uses, appropriate alternatives or mitigations would be provided where necessary.

Next steps

4.2.111 To help protect biodiversity, we are exploring options to expand the land available for species relocation beyond the plan presented at the non-statutory consultation. Additionally, we are working to ensure the project is ready to face future challenges by conducting workshops with engineering teams to incorporate climate change considerations into the design.

4.2.112 We are also exploring more sustainable options, such as renewable energy solutions like floating solar panels, to ensure the project is as environmentally friendly as possible. These measures reflect the priorities shared by consultees and support the project's commitment to balancing sustainability with its overall goals.

4.2.113 Our design will ensure the site is accessible and welcoming. This includes measures to create pathways and facilities that cater to diverse needs while considering the specific nature of activities at the site. Where full accessibility may not be feasible, alternative solutions will be explored to provide equitable options.

4.2.114 Walking and cycling routes will be designed with safety and accessibility in mind, balanced alongside environmental considerations, such as protecting local wildlife habitats. To further support inclusion, we will ensure inclusivity by following guidance from organisations like Sport England to ensure that leisure and recreational facilities are accessible for all users.

5 Key project design changes being considered

5.1.1 Table 5-1 outlines potential modifications to the masterplan that are currently being considered, informed by feedback from the non-statutory consultation. These possible changes contribute to the wider evolution of the project and may be reflected in the updated design across various areas and infrastructure.

5.1.2 The SoR as a whole explains how feedback from the 2024 consultation has been reviewed and considered. Where possible, we are exploring adjustments, and the table below presents additional design changes that remain under evaluation.

Table 5-1: A summary of key project design changes being considered

Topic/area	Outline of key project design changes being considered
Masterplan	• Re-distributing recreational value throughout the site by clustering activities by type • Separation of different activities for safety while ensuring spaces remain open for accessibility and ease of use where possible
Water	• Wilts & Berks canal – Exploring the opportunity of space proofing to accommodate future inclusion of a canal through the site • Reviewing watercourse layout to enhance functionality, resilience and adaptability • Refining recreational lakes sizing and function
Nature	• Exploring additional land for species relocation and habitat creation • Developing the proposals to meet the new Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy to provide mixture of habitats across the site, tailored to support diverse local wildlife and plant life
Movement	• Enhancing site-wide accessibility, with improved active travel networks strengthening connections to local villages and settlements • Upgrading Marcham interchange and other existing road improvement works

Associated infrastructure	• Refining locations and sizing of key onsite infrastructure as part of design development e.g. pumping station and rail sidings • Location selection for the water treatment works, which is now to be included in the scope of the project's DCO application • Reviewing the diversion proposals for the 132kV powerline to the northeast of the site and development of site-wide utility provisions • Further development of proposed foul drainage infrastructure, including connections to existing offsite wastewater treatment works
Renewable energy	• Renewable energy options are currently under evaluation include exploring the opportunities for floating solar panels in the reservoir and the identification of potential replacement solar installation locations

6 Applying insights to future engagement

6.1 Insights gained from non-statutory consultation

6.1.1 Whilst we did not ask a specific question on the consultation process, many respondents expressed their views around this. Of the 1,598 responses received by paper, online and via email, 256 voiced concerns around the consultation process, emphasising a need for clearer materials and better alignment between questions and the relevant information in supporting documentation. Additionally, there were 217 comments received about a need for more information and follow-up, and 150 comments noting a lack of information. There were also 20 comments that stated they supported the arguments and position taken by GARD, who believe the artists' impressions used in the consultation were misleading.

6.1.2 However, not all the comments received relating to the consultation were negative. There were 20 positive and supportive comments with 19 organisations specifically stating that they wished to engage further with Thames Water.

6.2 Our commitment to you

6.2.1 We previously launched 'Our Commitments to You,' an initiative outlining our dedication to meaningful engagement with stakeholders and the public. As part of this initiative, we are collaborating with the community to develop a design that provides accessible opportunities for recreation, leisure and education. Additionally, we continue to engage with schools and colleges to share further information about the project and will seek to explore training and employment opportunities for local people as the project develops. We are also working with local groups to incorporate opportunities for leisure and recreation activities such as sailing, fishing, bird watching, paddle and wind sports, running, cycling and trail walking.

6.2.2 We are committed to maintaining dialogue with local communities. Our dedicated engagement team ensures stakeholders are kept informed through a regular programme of parish, school, public and stakeholder briefings as well as written communication and consultation activities. This ensures they are engaged on key issues and encouraged to participate in formal consultation. We remain steadfast in our commitment to these initiatives and will continue to work diligently to achieve these goals.

6.2.3 Reflecting on the insights from the non-statutory consultation, we will further aim to refine our statutory consultation materials, so they are clear and easy to understand, as well as ensuring their alignment to the questions. To do this, we will use clear and concise language in all consultation materials, avoiding jargon and technical terms where possible. One way we will make the statutory consultation accessible is the production of an 'easy reader' version of the main consultation brochure which is shorter and less detailed. We will also use high-

quality images, maps, and graphics to illustrate key information. Additionally, we will carefully review and revise future consultation questions to ensure they directly relate to the information provided in supporting documents. We will also clearly communicate the decision-making process to reassure the public on how their input will be considered in the final design.

6.2.4 Some consultees raised concerns about the level of information available on the proposals. This is not unusual at the non-statutory consultation stage as the plans are still evolving. We will ensure our materials for the statutory consultation later this year include all relevant information, making it readily available and easily accessible to the public. This may include background reports, technical assessments and summaries of key findings.

6.2.5 We are actively seeking input from statutory consultees and interested organisations to inform the further evolution of the project. We will aim to respond to any queries or comments raised by these consultees in a timely and informative manner to ensure everyone is kept well informed about the progress of the project and any key decisions made going forward. Regular meetings are being held with these consultees in the run up to the statutory consultation later in the year.

6.2.6 We commit to regularly evaluating and refining our consultation approaches based on feedback received from stakeholders and the public.

6.3 Statutory consultation

6.3.1 The statutory consultation period for a DCO is a crucial phase in the planning process for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP). This consultation period is designed to ensure that the views of the public, statutory bodies and other stakeholders are considered before a formal decision on the consent application is made. The consultation requirements are outlined in the Planning Act 2008 and further detailed in various guidance documents.

6.3.2 The legislation requires Thames Water (as the applicant) to prepare a Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC), which outlines how it intends to consult the local community about its proposals during the statutory consultation period. The SoCC is consulted on with the relevant Local Planning Authorities (LPAs). This document will be made available for public inspection and advertised in local newspapers. The SoCC will detail the methods of consultation, such as public meetings, exhibitions and online platforms, ensuring that the community is made aware of the consultation and has ample opportunity to provide feedback.

6.3.3 Informed by the SoCC, during the statutory consultation period, the applicant is required to consult with a range of statutory consultees, including local authorities, environmental agencies and other relevant bodies. These consultees are specified in legislation and must be given the opportunity to comment on the proposals. The applicant must also engage with non-statutory consultees, such as local interest groups and residents, to gather a broad

spectrum of views.

6.3.4 After the consultation period, the applicant must compile a Consultation Report, summarising the feedback received and explaining how it has influenced the final proposals. This report is submitted as part of the DCO application and is considered by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) during the examination phase. The aim is to ensure that the development is well-informed by public and stakeholder input, promoting transparency and community involvement in the planning process.

6.4 Equality monitoring

6.4.1 The Equality Act 2010 protects people against discrimination based on nine protected characteristics. These are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

6.4.2 In line with the Equality Act 2010, and to help protect against discrimination based on the protected characteristics, we will be conducting an Equalities Impact Assessment of the engagement methods and materials to be used during the statutory consultation period, to ensure they are as inclusive and accessible as possible. This will take into account the feedback received on the consultation methods and materials used during the non-statutory consultation.

7 Contact information

7.1.1 We have a dedicated team on hand to help you with any queries you may have.

7.1.2 If you have any questions, please get in touch with our engagement team by email: info.SESRO@thameswater.co.uk.

7.1.3 For more information on our proposals, please visit www.thames-sro.co.uk/sesro.

It's everyone's water