

Reservoir Newsletter

September 2026



Left to right: Mark Garth, CEO of Affinity Water; Chris Weston, CEO of Thames Water; and Tim McMahon, Chief Operating Officer of Southern Water, visiting the proposed reservoir site in Oxfordshire

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AffinityWater

**Southern
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Ensuring water for life



Drought impacts across our region in 2026

Community update



Foreword from
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Delivery Director -
Consents and Place,
Thames Water

Summer 2026 was officially declared the hottest on record according to official Met Office reports. We've experienced five heatwaves, record-breaking temperatures and soaring demand for water, along with the driest July on record, with next to no rain in the Thames catchment.

In the Thames Valley, at the peak of the heatwaves we recorded the highest sustained water use we've ever seen; demand for water outstripped supply over several days. Yet this extreme hot and dry weather is also set to become our new normal. The Climate Change Committee warn that the UK is now "built for a climate that no longer exists", with temperatures above 40°C expected to become increasingly common in the decades ahead.

We're already seeing new weather patterns play out, having just experienced the fourth wettest winter on record for the South of England, followed by this extremely hot and dry summer. It's therefore critical we're able to store more water. It's why White Horse Reservoir is such a vital project. It would help to secure water supplies for around 15 million people across the South East, including Thames Water, Affinity Water and Southern Water customers. It would also reduce pressure on the River Thames, local watercourses, chalk streams and groundwater sources.

In fact, independent research shows that 89% of people surveyed across the South East view White Horse Reservoir as important to safeguarding future water supplies, while two thirds of people are worried about having access to a consistent supply of water. You can find out more about the research findings in this newsletter.

Community and customer feedback is at the heart of our reservoir plans. We held a statutory public consultation, between October 2025 and January 2026, where we received more than 2,500 responses.

We've been carefully reviewing and reflecting this feedback in our reservoir design and plans. We now have a much better understanding of how we plan to build the reservoir, including the access points that will be needed for construction vehicles to enter the site. This newsletter includes details about those changes, our targeted consultation with landowners and engagement with local authorities and stakeholders.

Later this year, we'll submit our Development Consent Order (DCO) application to the Planning Inspectorate, who will examine our reservoir plans and make a recommendation to the Secretary of State who makes the ultimate decision as to whether to approve the reservoir.

This is a major milestone and marks a significant step forward in the planning process, reflecting the considerable amount of technical, environmental, and community engagement work completed to date. You can find out more about how the DCO process works and how you can have your say later in the newsletter.

Thank you to all of our customers and communities who have taken the time to share their views and who continue to work with us as we develop our reservoir plans. As the largest water infrastructure project proposed in a generation, delivering White Horse Reservoir will require collaboration, commitment and ongoing dialogue with local communities and stakeholders. Together, we can help safeguard water supplies for the next century and beyond, while creating a space for nature and a place for people to enjoy for generations to come.

Best wishes,

Leonie

Listening to feedback

Almost nine in ten people surveyed back White Horse Reservoir

Recent independent research among a representative sample of 2,004 UK adults, conducted between May and June 2026, shows strong support for White Horse Reservoir and the role it will play in securing future water supplies.

Almost nine in ten people (89%) surveyed across the South East recognise the importance of the reservoir in safeguarding water supplies for future generations. The findings also highlight growing awareness of water resilience, with two thirds of respondents concerned about access to a consistent water supply in the future.

Beyond its role in addressing water shortages, the reservoir is expected to become a valued destination for local communities and people across the region. Eight in ten people said they would visit the reservoir, rising to 90% among those living within 5km of the site.

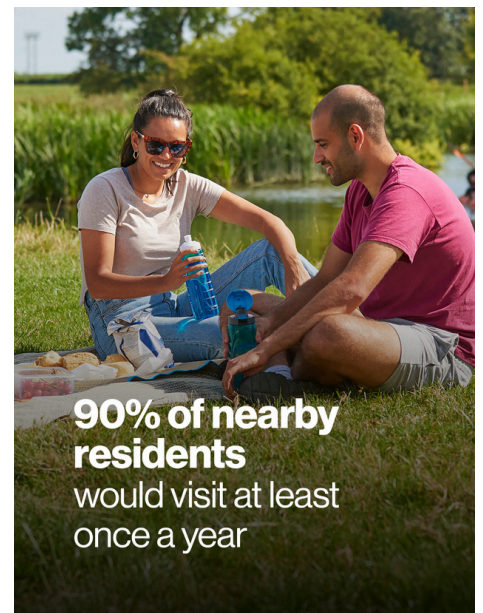
The recreational and environmental benefits were particularly popular, with strong interest in walking, cycling, wildlife watching, and other outdoor activities. Nearly half of respondents also expressed interest in taking part in water-based activities such as sailing, kayaking, and open water swimming.

Focus groups

In July 2026, four independent customer focus groups took place in Abingdon, Drayton, Wantage, and Grove, giving local people the opportunity to share their ideas for the future of White Horse Reservoir. Discussions focused on everything from recreation, nature, and active lifestyles to celebrating local history and culture.

People were excited by the potential to create a destination that offers access to nature, leisure, and recreation for all. They also stressed the importance of carefully managing traffic during construction and once the reservoir is open, ensuring it can be easily accessed and enjoyed.

This feedback is helping to shape our plans for the reservoir's future legacy, ensuring local communities remain at the heart of the plans as the project develops. For further information, please visit: thames-sro.co.uk/whitehorsesreservoir



Regional collaboration



Working together for water security

At the end of July we welcomed, our CEO, Chris Weston, Mark Garth, Affinity Water CEO and Tim McMahon, Southern Water Chief Operating Officer to the proposed reservoir site in Oxfordshire. With the reservoir set to secure supplies across the region, they discussed the challenges we all face, including yet another hot, dry and record-breaking summer, in which all three companies have had to implement hosepipe bans to protect water supplies and the environment. During their visit, they recognised the critical role that the reservoir will play in meeting the region's future water needs and increasing resilience to drought.

Latest news

Developing our plans

Since our statutory consultation, which ran from October 2025 to January 2026, we've been reviewing the feedback and have continued to develop our reservoir designs. We've also carried out more detailed planning to understand how the reservoir could be built, including the types and quantities of materials needed, where different construction activities would take place, when they would happen, and how workers, equipment, and materials would move around the site.

We now have a clearer understanding of the timing and location of construction activities across the site and have added light goods vehicles (LGVs) – used by suppliers, subcontractors and specialist trades – into our modelling. As a result, current modelling suggests that overall construction traffic movements will be higher than previously forecast and reported at statutory consultation. We're engaging with local authorities and National Highways to develop mitigation measures for construction traffic where practicable and this work will feed into our traffic and transport assessment. The final traffic forecasts and assessments will be included in our Environmental Statement which will be submitted with our Development Consent Order (DCO) application.

Additional construction access points

We're also proposing to include additional access points around the site (up from six to 17) to carry out construction and environmental mitigation works (such as new habitat creation) in specific areas. As these access changes primarily affect specific areas of land around the site, we're carrying out targeted consultation with landowners and others with an interest in land that may be impacted by this change. The feedback we get, along with feedback gathered during our statutory public consultation last year, will help inform our reservoir proposals which will be examined as part of the Development Consent Application process. You can find out more about our proposed changes to construction access points in our factsheet, at: thames-sro.co.uk/document-library.

What else has changed since our statutory consultation and how are we engaging?

We're refining our plans to create a reservoir everyone can enjoy. We continue to engage with local planning authorities and other stakeholders, gathering feedback on our approach to habitat creation, biodiversity, landscape, and recreational activities, along with our emerging construction plans.

During our statutory public consultation, we also proposed relocating three solar farms located on land that would be needed for the reservoir, to the west of the reservoir site. We've considered all of the feedback received, carried out further engagement with stakeholders, and have decided to remove this proposal from our plans. This followed feedback on location, discussions around availability of a grid connection, and environmental risks. We will continue to include floating solar on the reservoir itself, as previously planned.

What happens next?

We continue to carry out an extensive programme of environmental, archaeological, and ground investigation surveys. In fact, so far, we've conducted over 7,500 environmental surveys and have dug 1,500 archaeological trial trenches. We're also over halfway through digging 10 observational trial pits that are helping us better understand the site's underlying clay formations.

In November 2026 we'll be submitting our Development Consent Order (DCO) application to the Planning Inspectorate, as we seek permission to build the White Horse Reservoir. This is the planning process used in the UK for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and brings together the planning, land, and environmental approvals needed to deliver the reservoir. If granted, construction is forecast to begin in 2029, with the reservoir planned to begin operating in 2040. As part of the DCO process, local communities and stakeholders will have the opportunity to share their views on the proposed reservoir before the Secretary of State makes a final decision. You can find out more about the process and how to get involved at thames-sro.co.uk/whitehorsereservoir

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