

15 September 2026

The Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and First Lord of the Treasury
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

Business calls on Government to recognise White Horse Reservoir as a Critical National Priority

We urge the Government to grant White Horse Reservoir Critical National Priority status, recognising its vital role in securing the nation's future water supply.

More than two-thirds of England is in drought following one of the hottest and driest summers on record. By 2055, the country could face a daily water shortfall of five billion litres, yet no new reservoir has been built in the UK for more than 30 years.

Water security is essential for homes, hospitals, schools, farmers and businesses. Without investment in major infrastructure, water shortages risk restricting economic growth and housing delivery. The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management estimates water scarcity could cost the economy £25 billion over the next five years through halted housing development.

White Horse Reservoir represents a £6.6 billion investment in national water security and the largest water infrastructure project in a generation. It would deliver economic growth and business opportunities across the UK, create more than 1,000 construction jobs with opportunities for skilled careers, and support new homes and businesses. It would also protect precious rivers and chalk streams from the increased demands of water supply.

Public support is strong, with 89% of people in the South East agreeing the reservoir is needed to secure future water supplies and 84% believing it will boost jobs and the economy.

The case for action has never been stronger. We call on the Government to immediately designate White Horse Reservoir, and other major water infrastructure projects, as Critical National Priorities. This would create a level playing field with nationally significant energy projects, removing unnecessary barriers and accelerating delivery through the planning process.

The Government now has an opportunity to demonstrate leadership, protect economic growth and deliver lasting water security. We urge ministers to seize that opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

John Dickie

Chief Executive, BusinessLDN

Joanne Harper

Chief Executive, Activate Learning
Education Trust

Robbie Owen

Partner, Head of Infrastructure Planning
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Managing Director, Europe, India, Middle East and Africa, Arup

Paul Britton

Chief Executive, Thames Valley Chamber
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James Cullimore

Head of Advocacy, Water UK

Dom O'Donnell

Chief Executive, Infrastructure Matters

Sam Richards

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Signatories



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