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Report from GARD - August 2018

Thames Water concede the case for a second public consultation on their plans

On 10th August, Thames Water issued a press statement conceding the case for a second public consultation on their revised draft Water Resources Management Plan 2019-2024 (known as rdWRMP19). They also announced a month's delay until 'early September' in producing the revised plan, which will be published alongside their response to all the public comments (individual and organisational) which they received in the first consultation which closed at the end of April.

This action by Thames Water is as a direct result of the pressure from Oxfordshire organisations, led by GARD, in demanding the right for the public to look again at Thames Water's plans, as it was obvious from the shambles of the first plan that they would be forced into making deep changes, and not just minor revisions. GARD, Oxfordshire County Council, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Wantage and Grove Campaign Group and Steventon Parish Council all wrote to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove) putting a strong case that Thames Water must be forced to consult again. This call was heeded and it is a good example that *public pressure works* when we all work together. GARD would like to thank all the organisations for their support, and also particularly to Councillors Mike Fox-Davies (Steventon and Hendred) and Richard Webber (Drayton and Sutton Courtenay) for leading the County Council's campaign, and our MP, Ed Vaizey for his support in intervening with Michael Gove.

The second consultation will last for 8 weeks. We now await the details of the new plan. GARD will be tackling the new plan, and looking particularly to see if it remains shrouded in secrecy as to how projects are compared on cost, and how decisions are made. If we find that the transparency of the plan has not improved (and hopefully it will have since both Ofwat and the Environment Agency asked for more transparency), then we are almost certainly going to join the Vale council in demanding a Public Inquiry. It is regrettable that the actions of Thames Water force these conclusions – it remains to be seen if they have had a culture change, or whether they must be dragged into a legal process in order that Oxfordshire's citizens can be protected.

We of course do not yet know the contents of the revised plan, but we do know, from statements by Thames Water on TV (ITV Meridian news - 10th August) and in the press (Oxford Mail - 10th August) that the mega-reservoir is still the centre-piece of their plans, and may even be advanced in time to be begun in 2030. GARD will be fighting such proposals every inch of the way, and insisting on an honest, level-playing-field comparison of options.

Thames Water finally forced to take action on leakage

Another snippet we know of the revised plan is that Thames Water have finally committed to a proper plan to reduce their appalling leakage. They are committing to reduce leakage by 50% by



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2050. They have been forced into this commitment by the water regulator Ofwat, who finally lost patience with Thames Water's leakage programme, as leakage has actually got worse in 2016-2017 (going close to 700 Million litres per day for the first time). Ofwat's report concludes that the failure to reduce leakage has little to do with the difficulty of the task and is mainly due to Thames' poor management, and lack of Board-level commitment to the leakage programme. In order to avoid a massive fine for missing the leakage target, Thames have had to commit to the Ofwat target of 15% reduction by 2025, and a 50% reduction by 2050. If this 50% reduction is met, it amounts to a saving of 300 Million litres per day of water, equal to the amount which the proposed reservoir would supply. So, local residents would be right in concluding that the case for the reservoir would be even harder to justify.

GARD New Committee

Our Annual General Meeting was held in Steventon Village Hall, Millenium Room on Thursday 28th June at 7.30pm. The officers of the new committee, elected at that meeting, were:

Derek Stork – re-elected as Hon Chairman
John Broadbent – elected as Hon Vice-chairman
Deborah Bennett – re-elected as Hon Secretary
Chris Tooley – elected as Hon Treasurer

Nick Thompson, the Hon Chairman for over a decade and Hon Vice Chairman for the last two years, has stepped down as an officer, but remains on the committee. He was thanked by the meeting for his tireless contribution over the many years. In particular we are all indebted to him for his leadership which saw GARD win the Public Inquiry in 2010. Lesley Hotchin also stood down as Hon Treasurer, and was thanked for her work over the past year. The other members of the new GARD Committee are Sharron Jenkinson, Ian Moodey, Nick Rogers, Clare Tooley and Wren Wooster.

Joining GARD

It is clear that we still have a fight on our hands to defeat the Reservoir project and ensure a sustainable water future for Oxfordshire and the South-east.

Our membership continues to grow, but we need even more members. At some point it will become very important to demonstrate the strength and depth of the local opposition to this plan, and, of course, we do need 'boots on the ground' to help push the message across. If you would like to join us, or get any information on this, please contact our secretary, Deborah Bennett, at gard.secretary@gmail.com. Lifetime membership is £10 (under 18s and full-time students £5).

Derek Stork,
Hon Chairman,
Group Against Reservoir Development
11th August 2018.