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Report from GARD - January 2019

The Next Steps in opposing the Thames Water reservoir plans

The consultation on Thames Water's revised draft Water Resources Management Plan 2019-2024 (known as rdWRMP19) closed on 28th November.

GARD submitted a robust paper opposing the plan, and a copy of this will shortly be available on our website (www.gard-oxon.org.uk). Most importantly however, there was a very strong opposition response from local residents, local campaigning organisations and local political representatives at all levels. The proposal by Thames Water to bring forward the construction of the 'Abingdon' Reservoir to start in 2025 is overwhelmingly opposed by local campaign groups and councils, and universally in the locality there has been a call for a Public Inquiry into the plan.

The large majority of the Parish Councils in the area have issued formal responses opposing the plans and all called for a Public Inquiry. This call for a Public Inquiry is supported by the Vale of the White Horse DC, who state that they are not convinced by the Thames Water case, and by Oxfordshire County Council, whose response formally objects to the plan. CPRE Oxfordshire and the Wantage and Grove Campaign Group are also opposed to the plans.

We must hope that Thames Water will listen to the opposition, but their past record does not give much confidence. That is why it has been important that our local MPs, Ed Vaizey (Wantage) and Layla Moran (Abingdon and Oxford West) have called for a Public Inquiry and written to Secretary of State, Michael Gove requesting this. We would like to thank them for their support, and also thank local councillors, such as Mike Fox-Davies (Steventon and Hendred) and Richard Webber (Drayton and Sutton Courtenay) for their hard work in pushing the message and actions through the County Council.

Thanks also to those who wrote individually to the consultation opposing the plans and calling for a Public Inquiry. This time round there were a very large number of individual contributions, many of them copied personally to me, and featuring many forceful and thoughtful arguments. We now await to see Thames Water's response. If you wrote in, you will get an individual answer from them. If you find any of the answers are dismissive or evasive, we would be very pleased if you could share them with us (via email gard.chair@gmail.com), and complain to your MP.

The next step will be for Thames Water's new partner in the reservoir plan (Affinity Water) to publish their revised draft plan. This is expected in March. We will be responding to this, and we hope to co-ordinate our response with local organisations, and that you will all write to Affinity expressing your opposition. Affinity are 'new kids on the block' as far as the reservoir is concerned, and they have said they are keen to engage with our local concerns and hear them. They are less



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wedded to the reservoir plan as a solution than Thames Water, for whom it seems to have become some sort of sacred cow.

In spite of Thames Water claiming that the reservoir will be needed by the 'South-east in general', Affinity Water (who supply Hertfordshire) are the only prospective water company customer to express any interest. Other SE water companies (South-east Water and Southern Water) have already withdrawn their requests for future supply from Thames Water. **The analysis by GARD shows that the requirements of Affinity can be met by very simple and cheap schemes and improving leakage (sounds familiar?), until at least the 2060s.** Once again the reasons advanced by Thames Water do not stack up, and Oxfordshire needs to convince Affinity that much cheaper and more quickly deliverable solutions are available for their customers.

Please keep an eye out and respond to Affinity's plan when published.

Joining GARD

Our membership has grown considerably over the last year and continues to do so, however, to defeat the Reservoir project and ensure a sustainable water future for Oxfordshire and the South-east, we need even more members. If you would like to join us, or need more information, 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
14th January 2019.