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Report from GARD - October 2017

Proposals for Oxfordshire's future water supply

As readers will know, the proposed mega-reservoir that is on Thames Water's shortlist for new water resources for the 2020-2024 period, is justified almost solely (over 90%) by the predicted future needs of London. It is GARD's view, and that of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and the Vale of White Horse District Council (VoWHDC), that this reservoir is not a secure and drought-resilient option. We are continuing to challenge Thames Water's position on this – of which more below.

There is a predicted, but much smaller, water shortage for Oxfordshire in the 2030s and 2040s. There are clear, secure and drought-resilient options to supply this which do not use the 'left-overs' from a mega-reservoir to achieve them (this is Thames Water's only idea). GARD has made a proposal for re-use of water from Oxford, Abingdon and Didcot water treatment plants. This would be purified and piped over to the Thames upstream of Farmoor, to be abstracted into Farmoor for Oxfordshire supply. This source IS completely resilient to drought, and would also improve the river flow conditions in the Farmoor-Oxford stretch of the Thames in times of low rainfall. GARD have notified Thames Water (TW) of this option, but TW are reluctant (for obvious reasons) to explore it seriously. After our representations, the Environment Agency have informed TW that they should give it serious consideration. We await further developments – this scheme would supply Oxfordshire's needs to the late 2030s (it's capacity is in the region of 20-30 Million litres per day). Anyone wanting to delve into the technical details of our consultants report can visit our website at www.abingdonreservoir.org.uk.

Residents may also be interested to know that RWE (the owners and operators of Didcot Power Station) have made a 'pre-application' to the Vale for advice on making a proposal to supply purified drinking water from the water used to cool Didcot B. This scheme is said to be capable of 20-40 Million litres per day. It could operate either alone or in parallel to a GARD-type scheme – between them the predicted shortfall in Oxfordshire would be more than covered even out to the 2080s – completely removing any local justification for a mega-reservoir. We view this as an interesting development and have written to the Environment Agency pressing for a transparent process to examine this option. The last thing we want is for two huge private, and foreign-owned, corporations to do a deal 'behind closed doors'. The potential for TW to 'head-off' the RWE proposal clearly exists. We will remain vigilant.

The Oxfordshire Infrastructure (OXIS) stage 1 plan has been out for consultation (closed on 10th September). This is commissioned by the 'Oxfordshire Growth Road' (on which the County, District and Oxford City councils are all represented) and is intended to analyse and itemise the infrastructure needs of the county for the period to 2031 and beyond. The stage 1 report is very confused about the needs and issues regarding water supply for Oxfordshire. In a situation like this it is easy for a huge concern like TW to insinuate its pet projects (viz the reservoir) into a mix that the OXIS planners come to support almost by default. GARD, supported by CPRE, have tried to clarify the situation, and to make it clear that the proposed reservoir would be a *burden for*



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Oxfordshire to no benefit. We have written to leaders of OCC and VoWHDC to explain our position.

Reservoir study shows it is not Drought-resilient

GARD's consultant has completed an analysis that shows, contrary to TW's claims, that the proposed mega-reservoir will not provide a secure supply to droughts that are longer than those of the last century. The government has asked water companies to make their proposals more resilient against predicted climate change and especially longer and more severe droughts. We believe that TW's figures put forward in their reports to date are in error, and that the proposed reservoir would not survive droughts longer than about 18-months (the longest 20th century droughts were of this length). We have written to the Chief Executive of Thames Water, to OFWAT (the water regulator) and the the Environment Agency giving them our findings. We have been told by TW that they will reply 'within one month'. We will let residents know what they say, and, after we have received their reply, we will probably post the report on our website.

Joining GARD

Thanks to all those who have recently joined GARD, and to existing members who have sent donations into our fighting fund.

You can contact me (email gard.chair@gmail.com) or our, secretary, Deborah Bennett (email gard.secretary@gmail.com) if you would like to help, or to join GARD (lifetime membership is only £5).

As we have said previously, part of Thames Water's game is to try and reach a selected number of consumers (most of whom will not be local – so that they can be sold a biased view of the reservoir) to try to show to OFWAT that they have 'public support' for the reservoir. ***This is a numbers game, and we need to show we have large numbers of consumers on our side.*** It is thus important to like our Facebook page, and above all, to join GARD if you oppose the reservoir.

Derek Stork,
Hon Chairman,
Group Against Reservoir Development