

Address to Oxfordshire County Council on SESRO Motion

(Motion by Councillor Sally Povolotsky, item 17), 12 December 2023.

CPRE fully support this motion. The need for this reservoir is at best uncertain and at worst considerably exaggerated – the need is based on large, unrealistic population projections, a blanket reduction of groundwater extraction and an unlikely climate change scenario. There are considerable uncertainties in all these projections, and this suggests, strongly, that any strategic water resource project needs to be scalable and adaptable. We contend that the proposed reservoir can not be scalable or adaptable. This is in contrast other schemes, such as recycling water transfer and Severn – Thames Transfer, which can. These alternatives, also, will do considerably less environmental and social damage.

In addition, we are concerned that the plans for water in the region are fragmented and ignore the pressing need to invest to improve water quality across the rivers in the South-East. We call for a more holistic analysis of water across the region.

The RAPID project – which is supposed to produce a rational and transparent assessment of strategic water resource projects – is nothing of the sort. A typical example is the sudden increase in the size of the reservoir requirement from 100 to 150 million cubic metres – there are many other examples.

So CPRE fully supports the calls in this motion for a pause of the SESRO planning and the convening multi-stakeholder talks to fully explore the uncertainties, consequences and risks in this plan.

Thank you for your attention

Richard Harding, Chair CPRE Oxfordshire, 9 December 2023