

GARD Address to OCC SESRO Motion 17 – 12th December 2023: Derek Stork

Good morning, I am chairman of GARD, and a Steventon resident.

The hugely disruptive Abingdon Reservoir, the size of Gatwick Airport, and taking 15 years to construct and fill, can only be justified if one assumes completely unrealistic population growth, and if Thames Water are not held to account on bringing their appalling leakage record down to industry average levels by 2050.

Thames Water must be held to account. We cannot go on building ever larger concrete structures and desecrating countryside just to satisfy unrealistic growth projections and prepare water for populations who will never exist.

Thames Water's proposal for a 100 Million cubic metre reservoir was defeated at Public Inquiry in 2010, and Thames returned to this proposal again in 2019 and 2023. There was overwhelming condemnation of the proposal from Oxfordshire stakeholders.

With utter contempt for Oxfordshire opinion, Thames Water has chosen to ignore all the valid criticisms of local Stakeholders about its plans for this hugely destructive Reservoir. Instead, it has 'doubled down' and, without any further consultation, now proposes an even larger reservoir of 150 Million tonnes of water, 50% bigger than rejected in 2010. This proposal will increase destruction of habitat and atmospheric pollution during construction, lengthen construction time and increase flooding and safety hazards once built. The cost has already inflated by one-third since the consultation (now £2.4 Billion). This is totally unacceptable. Not a drop of water will be delivered by this project until 2040 – a full six years behind the date by which we could have a cheaper and more drought resilient supply from the River Severn transfer.

We call on the government to suspend this proposal whilst Thames actually addresses the issues raised, especially those of flooding and safety post-construction. The Secretary of State should also remove SESRO from the Ofwat major infrastructure (so-called RAPID) process, which is clearly not fit for purpose in establishing the facts.

I urge you to support motion 17.