

Annex 3

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL RESPONSE ON THE EMERGING WATER RESOURCES REGIONAL PLAN FOR EASTERN ENGLAND

Consultation closing date: 28th February 2022

1. Oxfordshire County Council is responding to this consultation along with the consultations on some of the other emerging water resources regional plans.
2. We believe that Water Resources East (WRE) and Water Resources South East (WRSE) need to work more closely together, and with adjoining regions, to address water needs, and that such work should lead to changes in the emerging regional plans.
3. There are some existing transfers of water between the two regions. Page 32 of the Eastern England consultation document advises that WRE currently imports 71 MI/d net from Thames Water, and exports 85 MI/d from the Grafham Water reservoir owned by Anglian Water to Affinity Water.
4. Page 57 of the Eastern England consultation document advises that consideration has been given to reducing the 85 MI/d export from to Affinity Water, and while at present it has been decided not to, this will be reviewed in the next regional reconciliation process. We support the current decision and consider that the current export should not be reduced in future.
5. In the Eastern England consultation document there appears to be a lack of consideration on the potential for additional exports to the WRSE region.
6. A South Lincolnshire Reservoir is proposed in the WRE region. The information provided to RAPID in July 2021, and RAPID's decision in December 2021 identify that the South Lincolnshire Reservoir is intended to not only alleviate forecast water deficiencies in the Anglian Water area, but also to enable water to be transferred to the Affinity Water area in the WRSE region via a new Anglian to Affinity pipeline. The reservoir would be fed by abstractions from the River Witham, South Forty Foot Drain and a transfer from the River Trent. A site has not yet been selected, but the area is a rural one between Grantham, Sleaford, Boston and Spalding. The options for the South Lincolnshire Reservoir being considered, through RAPID, involve a reservoir with a size of some 50 Mm³, and a deployable output of between 151 MI/d and 182 MI/d. We note that it has been mooted that this could increase to up to 229MI/d if there is a transfer to Affinity Water of 100MI/d.
7. The Fens Reservoir proposal in the WRE region, also being progressed through RAPID, would be located in a rural area by the Ouse Washes between Chatteris, Downham Market and Ely. It is estimated to have a deployable output of 99MI/d. RAPID concluded in December 2021 that it could support not only Anglian and

Cambridge Water customers, but also potentially Affinity Water in the WRSE region via the proposed Anglian to Affinity pipeline.

8. Both the South Lincolnshire and Fens reservoirs would be much smaller than the South East Strategic Reservoir Option in Oxfordshire (SESRO) being considered by WRSE for which the largest option has a capacity for some 150 Mm³, and a deployable output of about 293 Ml/d.
9. It is of concern to us in Oxfordshire, that the two reservoir proposals in Eastern England appear not to be progressing quickly, and that could lead to a potential bias towards the SESRO proposal, which Oxfordshire County Council has stated opposition to, our most recent resolution on this being made at full Council on 2nd November 2021.
10. Furthermore, we ask that consideration be given to the South Lincolnshire and Fens reservoirs being specifically designed to provide for inter-regional water needs. We ask this as we perceive that they can be designed in a sustainable way that does not impact on residential populations, unlike the SESRO site which is close to existing and proposed residential developments.
11. We appreciate that there are other supply-side components of the emerging WRE strategy. These include: re-use schemes, desalination, and aquifer storage/recovery. The Eastern England consultation document does not provide much detail of these, but we are generally supportive.
12. Page 39 of the Eastern England consultation document refers to growth in the area between Oxford and Cambridge being an inter-regional issue between WRE and WRSE. We are concerned that some of the demand scenarios being investigated indicate unrealistic levels of population and housing growth, and this could lead to unnecessary levels of additional water infrastructure being identified. We therefore ask that there be a reduction in the growth scenarios.
13. Having regard to the above, we answer the questions in your consultation as follows:
14. Question 1: *Have we gained a clear initial view of the problem of future water deficits across all sectors and the environment?*
We believe that further work is required as some growth scenarios are likely to be excessive.
15. Question 2: *Are we taking the right approach to identify potential solutions to mitigate the challenge?*
We appreciate the approach to identifying potential solutions but consider that further work is required to develop the South Lincolnshire and Fens reservoir proposals together with the Anglian to Affinity transfer, so that these reservoirs can provide for more of the future water needs in both the WRE and WRSE regions.
16. Question 3: *Does our emerging adaptive plan, including the immediate low-regret options such as reservoirs, look like it will help address the problem?*

More work is required to develop the proposals.

17. Question 4: *Are the technical methodologies, processes and decision support tools which we have used robust and appropriate for the task?*

At present we are not convinced of this.

18. Question 5: *Has our emerging regional plan been co-created in a fair, open and transparent process involving the right stakeholders and organisations?*

We appreciate that the regional plan has focused on organisations within the Eastern England region, but we consider that all the regional groups should be considering how to avoid the need for the scale of reservoir proposed in Oxfordshire, and therefore other groups need to be involved.

19. Question 6: *Are there any areas which you feel WRE should be considering which are not currently reflected in our plan? What have we missed?*

We feel that WRE and all the regional groups should be working together better.