

DIRECTION GIVEN BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE UNDER SECTION 35(1) OF THE PLANNING ACT 2008 (AS AMENDED) RELATING TO THE SOUTH EAST STRATEGIC RESERVOIR OPTION PROJECT

1. By an emailed letter to the Secretary of State received on 19 May 2025 ("**the Request**"), Thames Water Utilities Limited ("**the Applicant**") formally requested that the Secretary of State exercise the power vested in the Secretary of State under section 35(1) of the Planning Act 2008 (as amended) ("**the Planning Act**") to direct that the Principal Development of the proposed South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) project ("**the Project**") be treated as development for which development consent is required.
2. In its Request, the Applicant advises that the principal element of the Project ("Principal Development") comprises the following:
 - a non-impounding reservoir with the capacity to store approximately 150 Mm³ of water to be located in Oxfordshire.

(together, the 'Principal Development')

3. Other elements of the Project include:
 - associated development (within the meaning of section 115(1)(b) of the Planning Act) which may include, but not limited to:
 - (a) tunnels and pipelines for the transfer of water,
 - (b) temporary works to support construction, works to support operation and maintenance (including pipelines and treatment works), site accesses, temporary and permanent utility connections, highway diversions and landscaping, environmental mitigation, enhancement and compensation measures(together "the Associated Development"); and
 - ancillary matters (including matters that fall within the scope of section 120 of the Planning Act) ("the Ancillary Matters").

The Project can therefore be summarised as comprising:

- the Principal Development;
 - the Associated Development; and
 - the Ancillary Matters,
- all as detailed or referred to in the Request.
4. The Secretary of State notes that the Request relates to the Principal Development.

5. The Secretary of State has made a decision before the primary deadline in accordance with section 35A(2) and (5) of the Planning Act and wishes to convey that decision.
6. Having considered the Applicant's Request and the details of the Principal Development, the Secretary of State is satisfied that:
 - the Principal Development is not a project that satisfies the necessary criteria to fall within the definition of a "nationally significant infrastructure project" ("**NSIP**") under sections 14(1) and 27(1)(b) of the Planning Act and therefore it is appropriate to consider use of the power in section 35(1) of that Act;
 - the Principal Development forms part of a project in the field of water in accordance with section 35(2)(a)(i) of the Planning Act;
 - the Principal Development will (when completed) be wholly within England in accordance with section 35(2)(b) and (3) of the Planning Act;
 - no application for consent or authorisation mentioned in section 33(1) or (2) of the Planning Act has been made in relation to the Principal Development to which the Request relates; and
 - the Applicant's Request constitutes a "qualifying request" in accordance with section 35ZA(11) of the Planning Act.
7. Having considered the details of the Applicant's proposals as set out in the Request, the Secretary of State concludes that the Project is of national significance in accordance with section 35(2)(c), for the reasons set out in the Annex below.
8. The Secretary of State considers that if the details of the Project change, before submitting any application to the Planning Inspectorate, the Applicant may wish to seek confirmation from the Secretary of State that the development that is the subject of the proposed application is the same as that for which the Direction is hereby given.
9. The Secretary of State has taken the direction within the conditions as required by sections 35A(2) and (5) of the Planning Act, and issues this Direction accordingly under sections 35(1) and 35ZA of the Planning Act.
10. THE SECRETARY OF STATE DIRECTS that the Principal Development is to be treated as development for which development consent is required. Any application for development consent for the Principal Development may also include any matters that may properly be included in a development consent order (in accordance with section 120 of the Planning Act) including

associated development (within the meaning of section 115(2) of the Planning Act) and ancillary matters (section 120(3) Planning Act).

11. THE SECRETARY OF STATE FURTHER DIRECTS in accordance with section 35ZA(3)(b) and (5) of the Planning Act that any proposed application for a consent or authorisation mentioned in section 33(1) or (2) of the Planning Act in relation to the Principal Development is to be treated as a proposed application for which development consent is required.
12. This direction is given without prejudice to the Secretary of State's consideration of any application for development consent which may be made in relation to all or part of the Project.

Signed by

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Steve Reed". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

THE RT HON STEVE REED OBE MP

Secretary of State Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

Annex A

REASONS FOR THE DECISION TO ISSUE THE DIRECTION

The Secretary of State is of the opinion that the Direction should be issued for the reasons below:-

1. The Principal Development, namely the principal element of the Project is a development for which development consent is required since the Project is considered to be nationally significant having in particular taken into account that the Project would:
 - be for a complex and substantial scheme, involving extensive infrastructure works and requiring multiple powers and consents (including multiple planning permissions, compulsory acquisition powers and highway orders), and is therefore seen as a nationally significant development in its own right; and
 - benefit from an application being determined in a timely and consistent manner by the Secretary of State, and by removing the need for, and planning uncertainty of applying for, a large number of separate powers and consents.
 - be in a location and is of a scale that meets the relevant criteria and thresholds as required for a reservoir NSIP under S27 (1) (a) and (c) of the PA 2008.
2. Furthermore, the Principal Development would:
 - play an important role in contributing to a secure water supply for people in the South East of England, mitigate local flooding, and add flexibility and greater resilience capability across the water resources network.
 - be recognised as a needed and important piece of infrastructure in the WRSE regional plan and TWUL's published WRMP24. Additionally, the Project is identified as a key piece of infrastructure in Affinity Water's published WRMP24 and Southern Water's draft WRMP24.
 - Would make a significant contribution to the UK Government's environmental objectives.