



It's everyone's water

Secretary of State for Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs
FAO Richard Walton
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street, London
SW1P 4DF

South East Strategic Reservoir Option – Section 35 Planning Act 2008 Direction Request

Dear Richard,

Thames Water Utilities Ltd (**TWUL**) is developing a new reservoir in Oxfordshire, approximately 5km to the south-west of Abingdon, known as the South East Strategic Reservoir Option or SESRO (**the Project**).

TWUL supplies around 2.6 billion litres of water per day to around 10 million people and 220,000 businesses across six separate Water Resource Zones in the south-east of England and is the UK's largest water and wastewater services company. The current pressures on water resources from climate change, a growing population and increasing drought risk, as well as a need to protect the environment, means it is essential that new water resources are delivered across the region to contribute to a resilient and secure water supply.

The Project is a non-impounding reservoir with the capacity to store approximately 150 Mm³ of water. The Project is necessary to ensure ongoing compliance with TWUL's statutory water supply obligations as it is identified in TWUL's Water Resources Management Plan 2024 (**WRMP24**) (along with the revised draft Water Resources South East regional plan (August 2023), Affinity Water's WRMP24 and Southern Water's draft WRMP24).

Reservoirs are one of the categories of water resources infrastructure that can automatically qualify as a nationally significant infrastructure project (**NSIP**) under the Planning Act 2008 and the Project meets the size and location criteria set out in section 27 of the Act for reservoir NSIPs. However, because of the delivery model identified for the Project (as confirmed by Ofwat) through an Infrastructure Provider (**IP**) under the Water Industry (Specified Infrastructure Projects) (English Undertakers) Regulations 2013, the Project would not be constructed by a "water undertaker" as defined in the Act. As a result, the Project would not meet all the criteria under section 27 of the Planning Act 2008 to qualify as a NSIP. As such, a

Direction from the Secretary of State is required to enable the Project to be consented by way of a Development Consent Order (**DCO**).


The DCO process would provide the most effective consenting route for securing delivery of the Project and would provide the most efficient mechanism for securing the extensive range of statutory powers, permissions, consents and licences required. The alternative route of seeking planning permission under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, coupled with a multitude of other separate licences, powers and consents, carries a risk of substantial delay to the delivery of this piece of critical national infrastructure.

TWUL therefore requests that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs gives a Direction under section 35 of the Planning Act 2008 (as amended) for the 'principal'¹ element of the Project to be treated as development for which development consent is required.

This letter is accompanied by a 'qualifying request' under section 35 of the Planning Act 2008 for the Project, which is being made in writing and specifies the development to which it relates.

The information within the qualifying request explains why the conditions in section 35(2)(a) and (b) of the Planning Act 2008 are met in relation to the Project, and why the relevant 'principal development' is considered to be a project of national significance. The qualifying request therefore meets the requirements within the meaning of section 35ZA(11) of the Planning Act 2008 to enable the Secretary of State to give a Direction for the Project under section 35(1).

Yours sincerely,



Simon Adams
SRO Programme Director

¹ Defined within the enclosed qualifying request.