

WRSE Consultation
c/o Adams Hendry Consulting Ltd
Sheridan House,
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Winchester
Hampshire, SO23 8RY

14th March 2022

Submitted via email to: contact@wrse.org.uk

To whom it may concern,

Water Resources South-East (WRSE) – Emerging Regional Plan for South-East England (SEE) Consultation

We thank you for the invitation to respond to the above consultation. Our representations are submitted on behalf of Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce's (TVCC). They have been prepared in consultation with selected members, including those from our Local Chamber Advisory Group's (LCAGs).

Background

In addition to our comments below, we refer you to the TVCC's [2022 Business Manifesto](#) which sets-out our strategic priorities and actions for the year.

One of our four key priorities is "Helping secure investment in resilient infrastructure, utility, and sustainable networks" (see page -5-). Within our 'Connected' action priorities we also set out to "support efforts to secure the region's future water supply, namely by helping to ensure that a strong business voice is reflected in response to the WRSE consultation" (page -10-).

General

A secure water supply is essential for our region's resident and business society, economic growth, and the environment. With over 2.34 million (estimated) people living in the Thames Valley (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire) and around 240,000+ companies present, employing 1m+ people, the TVCC welcomes the development of a long-term water resources plan for the region.

We welcome and commend the water companies serving the SSE gland are working together through WRSE to plan to make sure we have a sustainable water resource in the future; and furthermore, that they are looking beyond the needs of public water supply alone to consider the needs of all water users.

The Thames Valley, like the whole of SSE, has important and key decisions to make to secure a sustainable water supply. Climate change is affecting when, where and how much water is available. The debate continues in regard meeting growing demand, and crucially making systems more efficient to reduce this demand, as household numbers and population grow, and business requirements change.

We are aware, and refer you to the, The National Infrastructure Commission, in their publication “[Preparing for a drier Future: England’s water infrastructure needs](#)” (2018) warned of the risks of future water shortages in England as a result of climate change and recommended that Government must ensure that capacity within the water supply system is enhanced in the face of this risk.

Subject to right and proper public consultation, including evidence of need and environmental impact assessment/s – particularly on larger proposals like the reservoir - we support the need to move forward and make timely decisions on actions needed to safeguard our future water supply. The potential consequences of delaying action would be huge for us all.

Specific Points

We have the following specific points on the priorities in the plan:

- WRSE has promoted a twin track approach, making the best use of the water resources that are currently available alongside the development of new infrastructure. We support this strategy approach.
- We support the need to invest in existing infrastructure. It is important that water companies continue to invest in their current systems tackling the amount of water that is lost through leaks and to work with government, businesses, and households to promote the efficient use of water. To achieve the ambitious targets set out in the emerging plan will need new approaches and techniques and we should harness the innovation and know-how from across the business community. The TVCC and our membership can support in this. Introduced by Thames Water, we applaud the recent Environmental Incentive scheme, which is essentially an Income Offset against Infrastructure Charges for new developments, which - as we understand - aims to encourage all new housing within the Thames supply area to reduce their future water demand and achieve a ‘*water neutrality*’ status.
- We support the need to invest in new water infrastructure. WRSE has considered a wide range of strategic infrastructure investments across the region as part of an overall package of measures. Overall, and subject to public consultation and needs testing, we support a balanced portfolio of measures to ensure a robust and resilient future water supply.
- An important part of the emerging plan is the proposed reservoir in Oxfordshire. We recognise that any major project can raise concern in local communities. This proposal is no different, including a most recent [question in the House of Commons](#), from David Johnston, MP for Wantage, to the Prime Minister (09th March 2022). We consider it vitally important that as a society we can progress new infrastructure development, where the case has been clearly made, the right and property consultation made, and wider assessment of impact / options considered.
- From a business perspective the proposed reservoir would not only help to ensure a resilient and sustainable water supply but could provide a significant economic boost to the Thames Valley in the short and medium term. This is likely to include the creation of new local jobs, a boost to small and medium sized enterprises having access to the supply chain as well as opportunities for apprenticeships and championing careers in engineering and construction inspiring a new generation of young people. Furthermore, the reservoir proposal could generate sustained regional and local benefits from environmental enhancements, new opportunities to enjoy the outdoors as well as boosting tourism in the area.
- We commend the adaptive planning approach promoted in the emerging plan. We trust this will provide the needed ‘touchpoints’ to review and reflect, challenge and adapt the approach and course moving forward, which our experiences suggest, recognising there are uncertainties in taking such a long-term view (often across land-use planning timeframes for example). The approach is encouraged and should be used in a progressive manner, rather than stifling or slowing decision making.

The TVCC is engaged with businesses and organisations¹ across the Thames Valley and would be keen to explore, and promote, opportunities for wider benefits afforded by new infrastructure such as improvements to the local transport system, and an approach that recognises our net-zero challenges, such as renewable energy generation.

We welcome a continued approach that is open and transparent that works to share information and ensure stakeholders, like this Chamber and our membership, have an opportunity to input and shape the plan.

We believe that a business-led input is a crucial component which can support getting the right long-term plan for the region. We welcome the opportunity to work closely with WRSE as it takes forward its work to ensure we have a resilient and sustainable water supply for the public, business community, and the natural environment for years to come.

Please accept this invitation to engage the Chamber directly as you move forward. We welcome the chance to have you speak with our membership.

On behalf of the TVCC and our membership we thank you for this opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Britton
Chief Executive

¹ Another example is our Sustainability Working Group – see: <https://www.thamesvalleychamber.co.uk/policy-events/sustainability-working-group/>

About the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce

The TVCC is one of the largest accredited Chambers within the UK and the only accredited Chamber of Commerce for the Thames Valley region. The Chamber is a proven centre of excellence for trade and inward investment services.

Representing over 4,000 companies in membership, with an economy estimated in size to be more than £83,848m (2015), it is home to over 115,000 businesses, including: 11 of the world's top 15 tech companies; the No.1 University in the world (Oxford); fastest growing city (Reading) in the UK (EY); once again, the two highest performing cities (Oxford and Reading) according to PwC; the second largest trading city in the UK (Slough); the most productive city per capita (Slough) (Centre for Cities) and the No.1 region, outside of London, for attracting inward investment. In addition, the Thames Valley Chamber credits a range of impressive statistics:

- 295,000 combined number of staff employed by members
- 5000+ number of active trade customers
- £1,692,474,094– the value of international trade enabled in 2018
- Average 150 new trade customers each year
- 178 countries trading with our customers
- 83 sectors represented by members and international trade customers
- Consistently one of the UK's most attractive locations for attracting inward investment
- 65% of international companies setting up or expanding in the Thames Valley have been supported by TVCC.