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Hon Chairman's Report to the Annual General Meeting of GARD **Tuesday 25 April 2017**

Overview

Last year I had the honour of taking over as Honourary Chairman from Brigadier Nick Thompson, who had led the fight against the 'Abingdon' Reservoir for 10 years. This year has seen an acceleration of the work on the Thames Water draft Water Resources Management Plan for 2019-2024 (*dWRMP19*). This has reached the point where, at least for new water resources, Thames have produced a draft shortlist of options. ***This list still includes a massive reservoir in the area between Steventon, East Hanney, Marcham and Drayton – the local area is still under threat.*** Thames Water will refine this list over the next 9 months, and produce a final draft plan in December 2017 for submission to the government (DEFRA). At this point we will know what their final plans are, and whether we will, once again, have to call for a Public Inquiry. ***I must therefore make it absolutely clear to GARD members that the next 9-12 months are crucial in making the case against the reservoir.***

Thames Water's current plans

We are now entering the fourth year of the five year planning cycle. The main event of this year has been the publication, in September 2016, of Thames Water's *Fine Screening Options Report*. This set out the proposed shortlist of options to be taken forward to the final selection phase. There were ***five types of option in the shortlist:***

- ***Indirect water re-use following purification:*** 2 plants in London capable of supplying a total of 360 Million litres per day (MI/day)
- ***Raw water transfer from R Severn to R Thames:*** supported mainly by water from Vyrnwy reservoir (United Utilities or Severn Trent Water) – nominal capability 300 MI/day
- ***Desalination of Thames Estuary water:*** 2 plants in London capable of supplying a total of 450 MI/day
- ***A very large reservoir at Abingdon;*** this exists in the shortlist in 6 different versions, either single phase (75, 100, 125 or 150 M.m³) or a two-phase project (30+90 M.m³ or 70 + 50 M.m³) – the largest of the reservoirs is, according to Thames' figures, capable of supplying 290 MI/day.
- ***Increased direct abstraction from the Thames below Teddington Weir:*** using treated water pumped upstream from Mogden to Teddington via the Thames-Lee tunnel shaft.

Together these options could provide more than double the water shortfall of 850 MI/day predicted for the region by 2080. It is therefore clear that Thames could select only 2-3 options to pursue in the time up to 2040, ***without*** needing to construct the massive Abingdon reservoir.

In the public consultation period since the publication of the draft Fine Screening Report, GARD and its consultant have spent much time and effort in criticising the reasons for the inclusion of the reservoir in the shortlist, and in exposing errors in Thames Water's reasoning and justifications. Our main thrusts have been: to point out that Thames have excluded other potential re-use plants for erroneous reasons; to point out that Thames Water have underestimated the yield of various raw water transfer schemes; to show that the Abingdon Reservoir is not resilient against prolonged drought; and to demand that the two-phased reservoirs be dropped from the shortlist as they will be particularly disruptive of the local environment – leading to a decade-and-a-half of continuous construction on our local site. Many organisations, and some individuals have sent in

criticism of the shortlist of options and the assumptions behind it. GARD were very much to the fore in this, and, indeed, our submission was only exceeded in length by that of the Environment Agency (EA). Although Thames have yet to publish their final report after the consultation, it is clear that they have rejected almost all demands for changes, although they have been forced to do more work, and to backtrack on some details. **We therefore expect that, when the final version of the report and the shortlist is published at the end of April, the large Abingdon reservoir will be maintained in the options.** We therefore have a struggle on our hands to try to ensure it is not in the final few options at the end of this year.

Thames Water have been much slower to choose targets and options for their parallel document – on *Demand Management and Water Efficiency measures of 2019-2024*. We do however expect this to come out at the end of April. Thames still have the second - worst leakage record of UK Water companies – nearly 25% of all water supplied is lost through leakage. They also have the second - lowest water-meter penetration amongst UK Water companies – only 35% of households are metered (compared to Southern Water's 85% total). Clearly the pressure must be kept up for Thames to adopt much more aggressive measures to reduce leakage and to increase metering (metered households consume around 15 % less water than un-metered). GARD will maintain the pressure here, and in this matter we are now arguing on the same side as OFWAT and the EA.

Next steps

GARD has now asked Thames Water to release cost information on its shortlisted options so that we can assess whether each has been fairly costed. We suspect Thames are skewing the estimates to make reservoir options appear cheaper and other options more expensive. We have appealed to OFWAT on this matter, and they essentially support our position. Hopefully we should have some cost information soon. It will then probably be necessary to employ expert consultant help on project and operational costs.

We need to dig deeper into Thames' dubious claim that the reservoir can be resilient to future more severe droughts. Thames are being reluctant to release vital information on this, and if this persists we may have to go to the EA, OFWAT, and if necessary DEFRA, to get them to budge.

Although it remains true that 90% of the future water deficit is caused by London's needs (and approximately 90% of the water from the Abingdon reservoir would be destined for London), Thames Water are quietly 'talking – up ' the deficit due to extra population/housing in Oxfordshire. They have not released an official figure for the Swindon-Oxfordshire (SWOX) deficit by 2080, but it is expected at the end of this month, and we must prepare for a local aspect to the battle. We need to develop our view of the solution to the SWOX deficit (as we did in 2010).

GARD needs to begin continue its political and community outreach, which has recently stepped up (see below), and to seek the more active support of the local councils. We also need to step up our communication with the public, and take the battle to social media (as the other side are beginning to do).

Other recent developments

Since last December we have stepped up our campaigning. This has included:

- Briefing the Local Parish councils at their meetings.
- Holding more regular meetings with CPRE, who remain fully supportive.
- Meetings to brief Vale of the White Horse District Council (the VoWHDC remains opposed to the reservoir plans, and our local councillor, Matthew Barber has been supportive).

- Meeting, along with CPRE, with Oxfordshire County Council's officers responsible for new Infrastructure planning (OCC will be forming a view on the necessity for new water sources within Oxfordshire).
- Joint meeting with the Environment Agency, to gauge their views on the reservoir and Thames Water's procedures.
- Criticising Thames Water's focus-group slides on water resources which they intend to present to selected groups of the public. These have contained thinly-disguised propaganda for the reservoir.
- Updating the website, and providing a contact email for communication to the Chair.
- Information news items in the local village newsletters, and a leaflet to all residents in Steventon, raising the profile of the reservoir threat.

Conclusion

GARD therefore has a big battle ahead. Our consultant, John Lawson, has put Thames Water on the spot by doing his own modelling and asking Thames Water to validate it. Time and again he is finding weak points in their work, and they have been forced to invest quite a lot of effort in countering his work. Thames are still trying to discredit John's work, but it seems that John's computer model of the water supply system almost exactly matches that used by Thames Water so he can now monitor and criticise the Thames Water studies which is a great help. ***It is however clear that the reservoir is still a favourite to be among Thames Water's selected options for early development.***

GARD needs now to ramp up the political and public relations battle and yet maintain the technical battle. In the fight to persuade the wider public and decision makers, it will not only be necessary to work more closely with our allies, but also to increase our membership. This is necessary to sustain the increased amount of work we must do. It will also, as indicated above, be necessary to employ other consultants to work along John Lawson. Our most critical needs will probably be in costing comparison, water quality and advice on climate change (so far the climate change contribution to London demand is not something GARD has been challenging but this probably has to change).

In conclusion I would like to thank to the committee who have supported the GARD efforts this year. I would like to thank especially the Secretary Lesley Lovell for her support to me and more importantly to my predecessor for several years. Lesley has now indicated she will be standing down, and we are now in need of a replacement. I would also like to thank Nick Thompson for his continued work as Vice-chairman, and his wisdom, and continuing willingness to act as substitute attendee when I have been unable to attend the Thames Water Forums. Without John Lawson we would have been incapable of putting up the necessary detailed technical challenges to Thames Water's work and we are extremely grateful for his continued work for us. Finally, without our Sponsor we could not have employed John Lawson, and we remain very grateful for his continued interest and support.

Derek Stork
Hon Chairman GARD