

# NEWS RELEASE



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## LONDON ASSEMBLY MEMBERS SHINE SPOTLIGHT ON THAMES WATER'S £1 BILLION RESERVOIR

Leading London politicians have turned the spotlight on Thames Water's plans to build a huge new reservoir. As Londoners tighten their belts to cope with job cuts, pay freezes and tax rises, Thames Water is proposing to build a £1 billion mega reservoir near Abingdon, passing the costs onto consumers across London in higher water bills.

London Assembly Members, Darren Johnson (Green) and Mike Tuffrey (Liberal Democrat), have both tabled questions to the Mayor of London, highlighting the need to investigate cheaper and more sustainable alternatives.

Boris Johnson has already taken a sceptical approach to Thames Water's proposals, stating in the forward to his draft water strategy: "We face a clear choice: to make the water we have go further, or to pay for prohibitively expensive new ways to secure water such as a new reservoir."

A make-or-break Public Inquiry into Thames Waters' future development plans is currently underway. Following the inquiry, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Caroline Spelman MP, will determine whether the plans get the go-ahead or whether Thames Water will be forced to reconsider its plans in the light of evidence from GARD, CPRE and the Environment Agency. The campaign groups argue that:

1. ***There is no need for a reservoir that would cost consumers a billion pounds in higher water bills.*** The reservoir could provide 60 million gallons of water each day - Thames Water's own forecasts show that the daily projected shortage in 2035 will be just 13 million gallons. The cost will be borne by consumers.
2. ***There are cheaper and more sustainable alternatives.*** Thames Water has rejected more cost effective schemes such as the Severn-Thames transfer scheme that could provide as much water at half the cost.
3. ***The building of the reservoir would come at a huge environmental cost.*** It would destroy 5,000 acres of productive farmland, increase flood risk and increase carbon emissions. It would involve a ten year construction programme, devastating some four square miles of rural Oxfordshire.

Darren Johnson, Green Party Assembly Member said:

"Thames Water's preferred option of building a massive £1 billion water reservoir to meet the predicted water shortages of around 60 million litres a day in 2035 seems unnecessary, given that almost ten times that amount is lost through water leakage each day in London.

"Thames Water should focus on completing the replacement of London's leaking Victorian mains, installing water meters in all households and other water saving household devices before hitting Londoners with a £1 billion bill.

"With claims that Thames Water's proposal for the reservoir are driven by financial motives benefitting only shareholders rather than Londoners, the public inquiry must consider all the viable alternatives to secure London's long term water security and provide value for money for Londoners."

**Mike Tuffrey**, Liberal Democrat Assembly Member said:

"With Londoners and government all tightening their belts and looking to cut waste, Thames Water must make a more convincing case if it wants to spend customers' money on huge new infrastructure projects rather than reduce leaks and wastage."

**Nick Thompson**, Chairman of GARD, said:

"For 20 years, Thames Water has promoted this reservoir plan but failed to justify why it is needed. It will hit consumers with a £1 billion bill. Boris Johnson has already described a new reservoir as 'prohibitively expensive'. It is now vital that Ministers stand up to Thames Water and prevent a Gatwick-sized reservoir causing irreversible damage to our countryside when there is no evidence to support it."

#### **ENDS**

For more information or to arrange interviews with Darren Johnson or Nick Thompson, Honorary Chairman of GARD and/or CPRE contact 07917 312 749.

1. The following questions to the Mayor have been tabled in the London Assembly:

#### **Abingdon water reservoir (1)**

##### **Question No: 2201 / 2010**

Darren Johnson

Can you give details of any representations that you have made to the public inquiry into Thames Water's future development plans which include a proposal for a new water reservoir?

#### **Abingdon water reservoir (2)**

##### **Question No: 2202 / 2010**

Darren Johnson

Do you agree with Thames Water's assertion that a new water reservoir is necessary to secure London's long term water supply?

#### **Abingdon water reservoir (3)**

##### **Question No: 2203 / 2010**

Darren Johnson

Have you undertaken any assessment of the likely costs of building the proposed water reservoir for the average London householder through their water bill, and if so could you share your findings?

#### **Regulation**

##### **Question No: 2329 / 2010**

Mike Tuffrey

What assessment have you made of the regulatory situation, recently highlighted by the Chief Executive of Severn Trent Water, which in effect gives water companies incentives to construct expensive infrastructure projects, with the costs passed on to consumers?

#### **Reducing leakage in London**

##### **Question No: 2330 / 2010**

Mike Tuffrey

What steps will you set out in your water strategy to encourage Thames Water to focus on reducing leakage in London, maintaining existing infrastructure and managing demand? Do you agree that this is preferable to building massive infrastructure projects like the Abingdon reservoir?

#### **Water Strategy**

##### **Question No: 2331 / 2010**

Mike Tuffrey

The GLA Strategic Plan states that the final version of your Water Strategy will be published in quarter 1 of 2010/11. When will you publish your strategy?

2. Boris Johnson states in his draft Water Strategy: “We face a clear choice: to make the water we have go further, or to pay for prohibitively expensive new ways to secure water such as a new reservoir.” He goes on to highlight, in paragraph 2.33 of the draft strategy that the Environment Agency “is yet to be satisfied that the proposed reservoir is the best solution for the company’s customers, the environment and the wider South East.”
3. The Group Against Reservoir Development (GARD) is a campaign group opposed to Thames Water’s plans to build a huge and unnecessary reservoir in the countryside, south west of Abingdon. Thames Water has ignored or dismissed more sustainable and viable long term alternatives. The campaign has the support of parliamentarians, district and county councillors from all parties, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and local residents.
4. GARD is challenging the plans at a public inquiry and has gathered extensive evidence to demonstrate that the proposed reservoir is unnecessary. If Thames Water’s plan is approved in the face of strong local opposition, work could start as early as 2016.