

# NEWS RELEASE



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## CAMPAIGNERS TARGET PUBLIC INQUIRY FOR THAMES WATER'S HEATHROW-SIZED RESERVOIR

The campaign group targeting Thames Water's ambitions for a huge new reservoir in Oxfordshire (GARD) is this week taking its fight to a make-or-break Public Inquiry into the company's future development plans. Thames Water is proposing to build a £1 billion mega reservoir near Abingdon, with the £1bn construction cost set to be passed on to consumers across London and southeast in higher water bills.

This comes a day after Thames Water boast about record profits of £453m and it is revealed that £1 in every £5 of a Thames Water bill goes to Macquarie - the Australian financial group that own Thames Water.

The Inquiry is expected to last for five weeks, after which time the new Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Rt Hon 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 will 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 just 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.

**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 £1billion bill and local people will be blighted by construction lorries on their roads for up to 10 years.

"The Environment Agency, GARD and others will all be giving evidence against the plans at next week's Public Inquiry. It is vital that Ministers stand up to Thames Water and prevent a Heathrow-sized reservoir causing irreversible damage to our countryside when there is no evidence to support it."

Minister and local MP, Ed Vaizey, said:

"The reservoir has been a running sore in my constituency for 20 years. I want to pay tribute to the campaigners - without them we wouldn't be anywhere near to holding Thames Water to account. It is still a case of David against Goliath as the local councils have had to fight this issue with barely any resources.

“The fact that the debate has rolled on for 20 years makes it hard for Thames Water to argue that a reservoir is essential and urgent. But the fact that it has rolled on 20 years has created uncertainty which needs to be resolved.

“The reservoir wouldn’t just affect me and my constituents – it would have a knock on effect on the constituents of MPs in the Thames Water region – around 8.5 million people. Residents and businesses would be forced to pay higher bills to support the construction. What this inquiry needs to do is investigate whether there are viable alternatives, and force Thames Water to investigate them.”

## **ENDS**

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

1. GARD will be challenging the plans at the 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.
2. The Government has recently stated that it will abolish Regional Spatial Strategies calling into question the projected housing number increases and consequently undermining the need for additional water resources to be provided on the scale proposed with the construction of a four square mile reservoir.
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.