

CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS WITHIN SOUTHERN WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Southern Water is currently consulting on its draft Water Resources Management Plan for 2020 to 2070: Securing a resilient future for water in the South East (the WRMP). The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the recommended consultation response to Defra who are managing the consultation on behalf of Southern Water.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. In 2017 the Environment Agency published proposals to reduce water abstraction from the Rivers Test, Itchen and Candover to meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, to protect wildlife and re-set abstraction to sustainable levels. These sources provide about two-thirds of the drinking water in southern Hampshire with the balance mainly being by groundwater abstraction. The River Test supplies most of the water to the Totton and Waterside area of the District.
- 2.2. The change to abstraction levels is from 136 to 80 million litres a day, and also to restrict abstraction when the river flows fall below 355 million litres a day, compared to 91 million litres currently. These proposals are subject to a current Public Inquiry, although the principal elements appear to be agreed, subject to special consideration of drought measures for water supply where in the overriding public interest.
- 2.3. As a consequence of this change in permitted abstraction levels, Southern Water needs to identify and invest in new sources of water supply to replace supply equivalent to around a quarter of current demand, alongside demand management measures and reducing leakage and waste. This includes alternative sources that can be relied upon in drought periods, when abstraction may have to be curtailed or reduced.
- 2.4. The short term plan for supply is to focus on reducing leaks and setting an industry leading 'Target 100' to reduce personal water use to 100 litres per day by 2040 (the current optional higher Building Regulations standard is 110 l/day). For water quality, the focus is to work with farmers and landowners to protect the quality of the water and improve rivers.
- 2.5. In the long term the WRMP sets out proposals to ensure a reliable supply of high quality drinking water in the water-stressed South East region. The main options identified include:
 - Recycling water from treatment works (especially for industrial users)
 - Desalination of seawater
 - New reservoir(s)
 - Supply from other water authorities using a 'water grid' approach

3. RECOMMENDED RESPONSE OF NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

- 3.1 The consultation document sets out 20 questions and the responses set out below are in answer to the relevant questions for the Council. Where appropriate, some of the specific questions have been merged in to one.

Do you think we should plan for a wide range of possible futures and how much water we may need to supply in each?

- 3.2 *Recommended Council response: it is appropriate for Southern Water to responsibly plan for a range of possible futures and how much water we need to supply in each.*

Do you think it's a good idea to plan for future changes to our abstraction licences which could mean we need to invest in new sources?

- 3.3 *Recommended Council response: it is appropriate for Southern Water to responsibly plan for future changes to abstraction licences to ensure that residents in the district have sufficient water supply.*

Do you agree with our plan to start investigating new options for water recycling, desalination and reservoirs now, in case they are needed in the future?

- 3.4 *Recommended Council response: new options for water recycling and reservoirs should be prioritised with desalination investigated as a last resort. We note from your customer survey feedback conducted during the pre-draft consultation that desalination was least favoured by customers, yet they recognised that it may be needed to meet a large scale deficit.*

Do you support our Target 100 to reduce personal water use to 100 litres per day by 2040?

- 3.5 *Recommended Council response: the Council support this approach in principle, but in line with government approach following the Housing Standards Review it should be implemented through the Building Regulations over time, and/or identified as an optional higher water efficiency standard to be applied through local plans where there is local evidence to justify applying it.*

Do you think it's a good idea to trade water with neighbouring water companies in a regional grid as part of the water resources in the South East group?

- 3.6 *Recommended Council response: There are in principle benefits to a water grid approach, provided that habitat considerations are adequately addressed. Abstraction from one catchment to serve another should only be from a point on the donor watercourse, and under flow level controls if necessary, where that level of abstraction can be accommodated without adverse environmental impact. The impact of routing pipelines through sensitive locations would need careful consideration. The Council is aware of water supply and water quality constraints affecting the Wiltshire/Hampshire River Avon and western parts of New Forest District, and the use of River Avon water to help address these matters in a manner that is sustainable in the long term should be the first priority.*

Do you support our Catchment First approach, to work with landowners, farmers and river trusts to improve the health of rivers and groundwater sources, before investing in new solutions such as water recycling or desalination?

- 3.7 *Recommended Council response: the Council supports this approach; it is essential for long term sustainability and would help to address the objectives of the Water Framework Directive to improve the ecological status of water bodies.*

Do you think our approach to provide water in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight is the right one? Do you think water recycling (from wastewater) has a role to play in securing water supplies for the future? Do you think desalination has a role to play in securing water supplies for the future? After we've introduced options to save water, such as reducing leaks and Target 100, which would you prefer us to develop first – water recycling or desalination?

- 3.8 This question is addressed by commenting on specific proposals. There are several schemes or options proposed within or adjacent to New Forest District, as set out below with a recommended response to the options.

Water Recycling Plant in Marchwood

- 3.9 Proposal for the 2020-2025 period to 'recycle cleaned water from our wastewater treatment works in Marchwood to supply an oil refinery'.
- 3.10 *Recommended Council response: support this proposal whilst noting that development is proposed in Marchwood, so any odour or other amenity implications will need to be appropriately managed.*

Desalination plant in Fawley and associated pipeline

- 3.11 Proposal for the 2020-2025 period to 'build a desalination plant on the Solent to clean seawater for drinking water'. The Technical document (page 71) identifies the location as Fawley. A number of pipelines could be needed depending on the final strategy and size of strategic supply options.
- 3.12 *Recommended Council response: that a location in Fawley is only considered as a last resort as other locations closer to Southampton and on the Isle of Wight itself would seem to be more appropriate to consider.*

Application of Drought Order for River Test

- 3.13 Application of drought orders on the River Test and Itchen are proposed to be able to breach abstraction limits if necessary (supply period 2025-2030). This is subject to a current public inquiry and Southern Water, the Environment Agency and Natural England appear to have reached an agreement in principle that would agree abstraction reductions but could allow additional abstraction to be considered under a drought order, although a decision is still to be made by ministers.
- 3.14 *Recommended Council response: the Council support this approach as a last resort where in the public interest to maintain essential drinking water supply, but a drought order should not be relied upon in preference to the provision of more secure and less environmentally impactful sources of water supply where there is scope to provide them at reasonable cost to consumers.*

Provide a new supply of water from River Avon through the New Forest

- 3.15 For the 2030-2045 period Southern Water propose to import water from the River Avon (in the Bournemouth area) by extending the regional water grid. Further discussions are needed to confirm this is sustainable in the long term and does not conflict with environmental obligations (for example this supply may be needed to reduce abstraction in the upper Avon catchment and thus not available for export). There is an existing pipeline across the New Forest serving the Oil Refinery, although a new pipeline may be needed.

- 3.16 *Recommended Council response: the Council would only support this approach as a last resort. There would be significant ecological implications as it appears that a new pipeline would have to be routed through the National Park and European designated sites. We are also aware of water supply and water quality constraints affecting the River Avon and western parts of New Forest District, and the use of River Avon water to help address these matters in a manner that is sustainable in the long term should be the first priority.*

Creation of a new storage reservoir at a lake near the River Test in the Southampton East Zone

- 3.17 For the 2030-2045 period Southern Water options include using a lake as a small reservoir. This is identified as a contingency option that could be needed post 2060 under higher growth, higher climate change impact scenario.
- 3.18 *Recommended Council response: this proposal be given more serious consideration as a core water supply option, and in the medium term rather than longer term. Capture and storage of excess flows for use in times of lower flow has obvious advantages in terms of overall resilience of supply, as groundwater levels and rivers are usually low at the same time. In principle it would appear likely to be much less impactful than relying on abstraction especially in drought periods (although potential local impacts of the particulars of any scheme would need to be assessed against the wider potential benefits). With appropriate management, such as that applied at Testwood Lake, a reservoir could have benefits for wildlife or for leisure purposes.*

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1. The consultation response will be sent to DEFRA, who is managing the consultation, with the recommendations set out above outlined. The consultation responses from all interested parties will then be considered by DEFRA before a final plan is published.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. Southern Water need to ensure that the supply of healthy reliable drinking water is provided for residents at a reasonable cost to the consumer and is equipped to deal with water droughts particularly in extreme circumstances. This needs to be balanced against ecological implications on the environment.
- 5.2. There are no direct financial implications for this Council

6. CRIME & DISORDER/ ENVIRONMENTAL/EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The proposals outlined may have a detrimental impact on the natural environment and this informs the recommendations set out above. The Council will seek to work, where possible, with Southern Water to minimise this impact where possible.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1. **It is RECOMMENDED that a response be made to DEFRA based on the comments set out in section 3 of this report.**

8. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ENDORSEMENT

I have agreed to the recommendation of this report.

Signed: CLLR E J HERON

Date: 2 MAY 2018

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Background Papers:

Southern Water 'Securing a resilient future for water in the South East – Have your say on our 50 year Water Resources Management Plan' Consultation March to May 2018

<https://beta.southernwater.co.uk/securing-water/water-resources-management-plan>

Date on which notice given of this decision - 2 May 2018

Last date for call-in - 10 May 2018