



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

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Mark Giddins
Chair, Planning Committee
Abingdon Town Council

Our ref: PO2025/14366/JS

Nichola.cayley@abingdon.gov.uk

30 July 2025

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your further letter of 30 June following up my response on the 6 March about Thames Water's proposed South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) near Abingdon, Oxfordshire.

I am sorry to hear of the repeated flooding your residents have experienced, and I understand the devastation and distress flooding can cause. Delivering on the government's Plan for Change, this government is investing record levels in flood protection. We are investing £4.2 billion over three years (2026/2027 to 2028/2029) to construct new flood schemes and maintain and repair existing defences across the country, a 5% increase.

The government has announced the largest flooding programme in history as part of its landmark Infrastructure Strategy. It commits a record £7.9 billion capital investment over ten years to protect hundreds of thousands of homes, small businesses, and vital infrastructure from the growing threat of flooding.

I understand that you are particularly concerned that the SESRO Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping does not include the whole area of Abingdon, and that SESRO will cause additional water course and groundwater flooding in this well-populated area.

Whilst I note and understand your concerns regarding the extent of the red line boundary agreed for the EIA, the Environment Agency (EA) informs me that Thames Water is responsible for undertaking the assessments of impacts on flood risk, and any concerns regarding scope should be raised with them. They will decide, based on expert advice, whether the scope of the EIA is appropriate.

Both the EA and Lead Local Flood Authority will provide advice on flood risk issues, based upon their respective flood risk functions and responsibilities. Beyond the requirements of the EIA, guidance also requires proposals to demonstrate that flood risk will not be increased to third parties and that opportunities to reduce flood risk are implemented where possible. This will be a key consideration in the provision of our advice, and we have asked Thames Water to ensure that the boundary for the flood risk assessment is suitable to capture all risks.

Reservoirs play a vital role in safeguarding our water supply by storing water that falls in the wetter part of the year to ensure continuity of supply when it is dry. England has an excellent reservoir safety record. Defra, the EA, Welsh government and Natural Resources Wales are working with stakeholders to develop a wide range of reforms to improve the reservoir safety regime. The Reservoir Safety Reform Programme will improve reservoir safety by strengthening roles and responsibilities (for reservoir owners, engineers, and the regulator) and improving safety practice and culture. For further information: [reservoir safety reform programme information page](#).

I do appreciate the concern of local communities about frequent flooding and the need for a viable flood scheme. Please be assured that the EA is actively working with Thames Water to build the access road to SESRO as a flood embankment to provide flood protection to communities and businesses in Abingdon.

If you would like further information, including on options to reduce flood risk in Abingdon, please contact Anna Burns, EA Area Director for Thames Area:
anna.burns@environment-agency.gov.uk.

I trust this information has answered your further questions on the SESRO.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Hardy', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

EMMA HARDY MP