

Via email only

Enquiries to: Councillor Alex Rennie
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My reference:
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Date: 20 February 2023

Dear Sir or Madam

PORTSMOUTH WATER DRAFT WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024 CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Thank you for consulting Havant Borough Council on your Draft Water Resources Management Plan 2024 which sets out how Portsmouth Water intends to achieve safe drinking water supplies for our residents and businesses.

We welcome the opportunity to work with Portsmouth Water on this plan, together with other water companies including Southern Water. We also support Portsmouth Water's recognition of the increasing challenges of climate change, population growth and the pressing need to support our natural environment together.

We are pleased to set out comments on the various elements of the Plan below, which focus on new water supplies into the future.

Do you support the balance between saving water from leaks, metering and water efficiency, and water being supplied from new sources?

The Council is obviously aware of Southern Water's Hampshire Water Transfer and Water Recycling Project which includes proposals to recycle wastewater from Budds Farm Wastewater Treatment Works and transfer it into Havant Thicket Reservoir in order to boost the amount of water the reservoir could supply to Hampshire during a drought.

The Council fully recognises the importance of addressing the significant and urgent need to address Hampshire's water shortfall and welcomes the efforts that are being made by Southern Water to address this. However, we do have concerns relating to the use of recycled treatment wastewater as a technology which would be new to this country, and in fact the first of its kind in the UK.

The process of using recycled water has a potentially high environmental impact and we remain unconvinced that this is the best way to tackle the water supply deficit in Hampshire.

The Council considers that better demand management and increased capacity at other reservoirs would reduce the demand for water from being supplied from new sources. We therefore welcome acknowledgement that from 2025 there is the potential to supply an additional 9 million litres of water each day in Hampshire, and from 2029 a further 21 million litres from Havant Thicket Reservoir which in turn, reduces the amount of water which would need to be supplied from elsewhere. Indeed it is noted that Southern Water themselves plan to increase water supplies into the west of the region through a proposed new reservoir close to Blackstone in West Sussex.

History of Havant Spring

The Borough of Havant is perhaps best known for its acclaimed spring water, which is regarded as one of the best examples of Chalk karst springs in the UK. In fact, this is how the town derives its name, being known in 935AD as 'Hamafunta' the spring of Hama.

For much of our history, fresh water has played a vital part in local commerce, from water mills to parchment manufacture to brewing. We are a Borough built on the remarkable natural geography of the Bedhampton Spring.

The springs are large, with a combined flow of approximately 104 000 m³/day — enough to fill 40 Olympic-sized swimming pools every day.

During the winter, much of this water flows into Langstone Harbour, excess to the drinking needs of the Borough. Indeed in 2021 I was pleased to support plans for the Havant Thicket Reservoir and a pipeline to fill it with spring water which will be the first new reservoir to be built in the South East since the 1970s.

Havant Thicket Reservoir

The new reservoir will be a fantastic resource and will reduce the water strain on the South East. We welcome and still support the reservoir. However, throughout the process, Councillors were told that this reservoir would be filled from excess water from the Bedhampton Springs. The below extract is from Page 2 of the 121 Page planning application.

“The reservoir, when constructed, would be filled with surplus water drawn from the springs at the Bedhampton works during the winter when flows are at their highest - via a new combined inlet/outline pipeline. The reservoir would provide water supplies to Portsmouth Water customers in the summer months as required. Additionally, it would allow Portsmouth Water to transfer water to East Hampshire to supply Southern Water’s customers, even in a severe drought.”

Havant Borough Council has serious concerns about why Southern Water did not make clear its wish to use water recycling during the planning process for the outline planning application that concluded last summer. This would have I'm sure have had an impact on the public perception on the reservoir project and application. Residents in this Borough are wary of Southern Water due to the reputational impact of the record £90million fine that it received for 6,971 unpermitted sewage discharges in 2021.

We welcome the commitment that, before providing support for this option Portsmouth Water will need to be satisfied that the recycled water from this project will need to meet strict, high drinking water quality standards. In addition, that it would need to be demonstrated that there would be no detrimental impact on Portsmouth Water's environmental commitments around Havant Thicket Reservoir.

The Council agrees that it is of the utmost importance that the proposal is correctly scrutinised to ensure it delivers safe drinking water in an environmentally responsible way. As a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, the Secretary of State is the consenting authority in place of the Council as the local planning authority. As such, it is appropriate for there to be meaningful engagement and cooperation between Southern Water, Portsmouth Water and the Council before the proposal is submitted for consideration through the Development Consent Order process.

In particular, the Council has sought ongoing engagement between Southern Water and our residents in relation to the water recycling project between now and the formal consultation on the Hampshire Wastewater Transfer and Recycling Project which took place during the Summer 2022.

Do you support our plans to help homeowners and businesses save water?

Countries around the world are facing rising goods and energy prices, inflation and cost of living pressures, and the UK is no exception. The rising cost of living is affecting everybody in different ways.

We welcome Portsmouth Water's initiatives to save water which will help our residents and businesses to reduce the cost of water and energy bills.

Conclusion

Havant Borough Council welcomes this draft Water Resources Management Plan which will help to secure safe drinking water supplies for our residents and businesses over the next 50 years. It is a key priority of the Council to deliver infrastructure projects that will help towards addressing climate change, and indeed we look forward to working with you to deliver the Plan. Whilst we recognise there is a very clear need to address the water shortfall in deficit, we remain unconvinced that Southern Water's water recycling project represents a sound environmental solution.

Yours faithfully

Alex Rennie

Councillor Alex Rennie
Leader of the Council