

## **Your Drinking Water - How Safe WILL it Be?**

There is a growing concern amongst the customers of Portsmouth Water that the future of their drinking water will be compromised by the involvement of Southern Water in the Havant Thicket reservoir. Initially it was a partnership with Portsmouth Water to invest in the construction of the reservoir whereby Southern Water could use the surplus to supply its customers in Hampshire.

Portsmouth Water, as a company, supplies 304,000 homes and businesses stretching from the River Meon in Hampshire to the River Arun in West Sussex. It is much respected having earned a reputation of maintaining high standards whilst having the lowest water supply charges in England and Wales. Despite southern England experiencing the driest July last year since records began in 1836 the company was never required to announce hosepipe bans. (Unlike Southern Water who were the first to declare a hosepipe ban.)

The company had always planned for the long term by setting aside land for the building of a reservoir. The number of developments being forced upon the region was a growing factor to bring this scheme to fruition. Also it was becoming urgent to protect the very existence of the hugely important and unique chalk streams of the Rivers Test and Itchen which were being jeopardised by continuous extraction.

And so in October 2021 construction started on the Havant Thicket reservoir with a planned opening in 2029. It is designed to hold about 8.7 billion litres of water when full which would supply about 160,000 homes.

The source of the water will come from springs at Bedhampton. According to Bob Taylor, CEO of Portsmouth Water “These springs deliver a high quality, sustainable supply of water all year round and are thought to be the largest individual source of spring water in Europe.....In the winter there is a surplus of water which then flows out to the sea.” By using the reservoir as storage water can then be redistributed across the region.

He goes on to say that **“Havant Thicket reservoir is first and foremost an environmentally-led project.”** The project will create a new wildlife conservation area by developing a 10 hectare wetland on the reservoir’s northern edge that will encourage biodiversity, provide a resilient habitat and give a new green space for the communities.

The Planning Application was passed as the scheme and the integrity of the drinking water would be enhanced by the wildlife habitat it would contain.

But now it is here that black clouds start appearing in the form of Southern Water. As previously mentioned a joint venture was formed with Portsmouth Water to help finance the reservoir in order to ease the pressure they had in supplying sufficient drinking water to their Hampshire customers. It was on that basis that the Planning Application was accepted.

Then out of the blue they suddenly announced - **their intention to pump recycled effluent from Budds Farm WWTw into this new reservoir filled with spring water and surrounded by a wetland haven - without any consultation.** They propose to install a ‘reverse osmosis’ system which they had never used before.

Cllr Alex Rennie Leader of Havant Borough Council on August 17th 2022 said: **“The council has serious concerns about why Southern Water did not make clear its wish to use water recycling during the planning process.”** Might this be because Southern Water knew that permission would not be forthcoming as they were very aware of how Havant and other communities viewed their reputation.

We are all too well aware of their reputation – not helped by the lack of any effectual monitoring by Defra and the Environment Agency, and the ineffectual punishment of a few million pounds by Ofwat which is then passed on to the customers. And then there is complete disregard to the safety to constituents by our elected MP, Gillian Keegan, who has consistently voted to allow Southern Water to continue to poison our protected waters and environment unchecked for another 15 years. With this apparent sleight of hand it is difficult to believe there is anything in the history of Southern Water

that could give Portsmouth Water customers any confidence in their involvement.

According to Havant Civic Society - If Southern Water's water recycling project receives approval, then up to 60 million litres per day of recycled effluent from Budds Farm would be pumped to the reservoir, negating several of the advantages of the original reservoir proposal. It would have a detrimental effect upon the wildlife habitats and also there is no guarantee that the treatment will be sufficiently effective in cancelling out the many chemicals that can survive reverse osmosis.

The Chief Exec of Portsmouth Water has confirmed that Portsmouth Water customers will routinely receive water from the reservoir which will be a mix of recycled effluent and spring water if Southern Water's plans go ahead. This represents a significant change of use relating to the previously approved Portsmouth Water planning application. **The environmental impact of the introduction of recycled effluent to the reservoir has not been assessed.**

There is so much that is yet to be clarified so if you feel uncomfortable with the involvement of Southern Water in this manner then please write directly to Defra who are holding a consultation that has a closing date of 20<sup>th</sup> February.

The contact address is:

[water.resources@defra.gov.uk](mailto:water.resources@defra.gov.uk) and refer to 'Southern Water draft water resources management plan'.

There is also a petition being run by Friends of Earth Havant on Change.org 'Drinking Southern Waters Recycled Sewage'.

Havant Borough Council will be holding a live questionnaire on all these issues between Portsmouth Water and Southern Water on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> Feb from 17.00pm – 19.00pm. For those wishing to send in questions use

[AskUs@havant.gov.uk](mailto:AskUs@havant.gov.uk).

It is hugely important that we all make our voices heard and take this opportunity to protect for our families and children our drinking water - the prime essence of life.

SOSCA end 5<sup>th</sup> February 2023

