

## **Size matters: plans for the Upper Thames reservoir and the new environmentalism.**

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**SYNOPSIS.** Thames Water Ltd is planning to construct, over farmland near Abingdon, a very large reservoir (100 MCM) for completion by 2026, mainly to supply London. The social and historical context of this Upper Thames Reservoir (UTR) is explored. Water transfers from the Severn catchment as proposed by the Water Resources Board in 1974 to supplement storage are not included in the present plans. Nor is heed taken of Thames Water Authority planners who argued in 1981 that small, environmentally-sensitive reservoirs could be just as economical as the huge.

More recently, a new environmentalism has developed. This encompasses anthropogenic climate change and produces both anxiety and hopes that dire consequences may be offset by urgent human actions. In response, many changes of significance for energy and water supply planning are underway. Emerging decentralised technologies focusing on combined heat and power and renewable energy lessen water demand, promise more accountability, more co-operation from the public and more integration between production and use of energy, water conservation, waste disposal and improvements in habitats. The emphasis on local initiatives for sustainability and consequent predicted reduction in demand for water supply suggests a reappraisal of the case for an UTR on the scale proposed.