

Appendix 32: Ver Valley Society

| 1. Ver Valley Society | | |
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| 1.1 | Representation | <p>The Ver Valley Society is pleased to see that a considerable number of improvements have been made to Affinity Water's latest draft Water Resources Management Plan (dWRMP) since the consultation process began over 18 months ago. A fuller exploration of options beyond Affinity's area of operations to reduce the 65% reliance on aquifers, the increased likelihood of the South East Strategic Reservoir (SESR) being built and investment in Supply 2040 to deliver an improved network for water transfers are all most welcome.</p> <p>However, in respect of the River Ver and its neighbouring chalk streams in the Chilterns, we still have major concerns that there's a lack of appetite to recognise how critical the current environmental situation is and little desire to respond with enthusiasm to protect it.</p> <p>The Ver is already under extreme stress. Winterbourne sections are longer than ever, and stretches that used to be occasionally dry are now only occasionally wet. The river is currently dry for over 11km of its 28km length. No flow in the upper reaches also means the flow in the lower reaches of the river is poor, leading to a build-up of silt and the smothering of life-giving gravels. Water temperatures vary more widely too. Our chalk stream's biodiversity is falling and the valley is a much less effective wildlife corridor. (Lost or declining in range include water crowfoot, freshwater shrimps, olives, cased caddis, freshwater mussels, brown trout, chub, water voles and mute swans for example.)</p> <p>Affinity's dWRMP should deliver more for the environment, specifically:</p> |
| | Our Response | <p>We are committed to monitoring the River Ver catchment to understand the groundwater level and river flow response from historic and more recent reductions in abstraction under all background groundwater level conditions. The total catchment abstraction in the Ver has been reduced by approximately 40% since the 1990s, with further reductions planned for AMP7. Friars Wash source itself has been reduced by an average of 13MI/d in 1993 allowing more water in the aquifer at this location. Despite this, the river still goes dry under low groundwater level conditions in the vicinity of the source. Our monitoring programme in both AMP6 and AMP7 is aimed to shed more light into the river flow responses under all groundwater level conditions and better define the groundwater-surface water interactions.</p> <p>Wider improvements to chalk streams through our river restoration programme are outlined in our Business Plan 2019.</p> <p>In addition, please see responses below, 1.2 to 1.4.</p> |
| | Summary of any change to our final WRMP | N/A |
| 1.2 | Representation | <p><u>Link new resources to reduced take from the chalk aquifer</u></p> <p>Despite chalk streams being globally rare and a unique ecosystem singled out for protection, there's no definitive commitment in the dWRMP to link new sources of water with opportunities to reduce the take from the chalk aquifer - leaving more for the environment. We would like to see the dWRMP contain assurances that these endangered streams will be beneficiaries.</p> |
| | Our Response | <p>We include a possible need to further reduce abstraction from chalk catchments beyond December 2024 by 7 MI/d in our Challenging future. We have added a "further reductions in abstraction from the chalk" scenario to our sensitivity testing. This considers the position if we are required to deliver up to an additional 40 MI/day of abstraction reductions. Within this scenario we will need to continue</p> |

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| | | limited reliance on Drought Orders and Permits until our first strategic resource can be developed. We would therefore need to consider developing either the GUC transfer, or a water trading option with Thames Water as these have shorter lead times than the other strategic options. |
| | Summary of any change to our final WRMP | Further reduction in abstraction from the Chalk is explored as a scenario in Chapter 5 of the fWRMP19. |
| 1.3 | Representation | <p><u>Accelerate the introduction of new resources</u></p> <p>The Society supports the building of the South East Strategic Reservoir and we would like to see more emphasis on introducing this and other strategic options to bring water to the Central Region as a matter of urgency. Presently the Ver chalk stream has at least another 20 years to endure before any of the proposed schemes could deliver a benefit.</p> |
| | Our Response | The timing of our first strategic option has been carefully considered and determined according to our decision-making methodology. The results of that modelling are provided in section 7.2.4 of the main SoR document. |
| | Summary of any change to our final WRMP | An update regarding decision making is provided in Chapter 5 of the fWRMP19. |
| 1.4 | Representation | <p><u>Take early action to promote consumer water saving</u></p> <p>We would ask that the trigger levels for heavyweight water saving campaigns and Tactical Usage Bans (TUBs - formerly hosepipe bans) are reset, so that they are introduced at an earlier point as groundwater levels fall.</p> <p>Presently the groundwater at the head of the Ver Valley is at the lowest official level, 'exceptionally low' and has been below the Long Term Average for 54 consecutive months - 4.5 years - and yet water saving messages are minimal and a TUBs isn't close to being implemented. There appears to be a total disconnect between the poor state of the chalk stream environment in the field and the remedial action being taken. The parlous state of the Ver today is a troubling indicator of what will continue to happen for the next 5 year period unless further significant changes are made.</p> |
| | Our Response | <p>Our fWRMP Section 6.2 describes our demand management strategy in detail, the main components of which are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reducing PCC of household customers • reducing non-household demand • reducing leakage <p>We have recently launched our 'manifesto' of water efficiency and have already started public events (such as our #whynotwater campaign), which seeks to gain public and NGO support for initiatives such as Water Efficient Labelling Schemes (WELs) and hence influence local authorities and national bodies to support initiatives that will inherently improve the efficiency of water using devices to reduce demand.</p> |
| | Summary of any change to our final WRMP | An update regarding our demand management strategy is provided in Chapter 6 of the fWRMP19. |