



Meeting note

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| Project name | River Thames Scheme |
| File reference | |
| Status | Final |
| Author | The Planning Inspectorate |
| Date | 6 December 2021 |
| Meeting with | Environment Agency and Surrey County Council |
| Venue | Microsoft Teams |
| Meeting objectives | Inception Meeting |
| Circulation | All attendees |

Summary of key points discussed, and advice given

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) advised that a note of the meeting would be taken and published on its website in accordance with section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 (the PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

The Inspectorate explained that the publication of the meeting note could be delayed up to six months, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted (if requested by an Applicant for commercial reasons).

Background to RTS Project

The Applicant introduced the River Thames Scheme (RTS). The Applicant stated that recurrent flooding has drastically affected this area of Surrey. With climate change, the winter daily average rainfall in England is anticipated to increase, thereby increasing the risk of frequent flooding due to increases in peak river flows. The Applicant added that flooding has resulted in a significant negative economic impact within the area.

The Applicant explained that the proposal includes a flood relief channel in two sections with capacity improvements. The Applicant stated that the RTS will create additional capacity in new river channels and additional weir gates, allowing the Environment Agency to manage its flows. The RTS also includes opportunities for recreation as well as access to the river, and open green spaces in Runnymede and Spelthorne with foot and cycle paths (focussing on active travel), which will all provide health benefits. The Applicant added that the RTS will also include habitat creation and improvements with the intention of achieving approximately 20% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

Who is promoting RTS

The Applicant explained that the scheme is being delivered through a multi-agency partnership, with the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council as the promoter of

the DCO. The Applicant stated that the scheme is part of the Environment Agency's wider flood management strategy along the River Thames and is a part of the Council's county wide Flood Resilience Strategy.

S35 Direction

The Applicant applied for a section 35 direction under the Planning Act 2008 for the RTS, requesting that the development is treated as development for which Development Consent is required. The Applicant received a section 35 Direction on 24 December 2020. The section 35 Direction (by reference to the application letter) sets out the various elements of the RTS that are part of the development for which Development Consent is required and those parts that are associated development.

Past and Future Consultation and Engagement

The Applicant summarised the stakeholder engagement within the last decade which included public exhibitions and numerous consultations with councillors, landowners, and residents. There had also been meetings with external environmental groups and internal specialists. The Applicant explained that further consultation continued, including various discussion workshops, resident surgeries and public drop-ins were held. Posters and newsletters were provided, and engagement was present throughout social media.

DCO Programme

The Applicant outlined the next steps of the DCO programme, highlighting autumn-winter engagement that includes its website launch. The Applicant will continue engagement with statutory consultees. The Applicant stated that it was beginning work on its Environmental Impact Assessment scoping request but that the request was not imminent and it would update the Inspectorate prior to any submission.

The Applicant confirmed that it had undertaken scoping under the Town and Country Planning regime in compliance with the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations in 2017. The Inspectorate asked the Applicant whether there was a need for a formal scoping process through the NSIP regime. The Applicant stated that scoping was necessary due to the number of scheme changes compared to the last formal scoping process, including the removal of a channel between Datchet and Hythe End and the , changes to the location and design of the open green space as well as inclusion of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) sites. The Applicant also considered that submitting a new scoping request would provide all stakeholders with clarity over the nature and extent of the RTS to be comprised in the DCO application.

The Inspectorate queried what metric the Applicant would use to support its BNG calculations. The Applicant stated that this was currently under review and requested a separate meeting to discuss the matter in further detail. The Inspectorate noted that the legal commitment to implement BNG for NSIPs would not come in until 2025 and asked whether this would have any implication for requests for compulsory acquisition powers. The Applicant explained that the situation is different for the RTS as BNG is an integral part of the Proposed Development and is included in the description of development for which development consent is required under the S35 direction. The Applicant therefore considered that, in principle, compulsory acquisition powers can be sought.

The Inspectorate noted that there are other projects and proposed NSIP applications in the local area including elements of Heathrow expansion and Western Rail Link projects and asked how this was being addressed in the Applicant's cumulative impact assessment. The Applicant stated that they had been in discussions with Heathrow and maintained a good relationship with them. However, they have not re-engaged since the preparation of the section 35 Direction request. The Inspectorate highlighted that any specific overlaps, between the two schemes and their construction programmes would need to be addressed.

The Applicant stated that there is broad support for the scheme from stakeholders and noted the project includes some complex land interests.

AOB

The Applicant confirmed that by March 2022 it would discuss the latest project programme with the Inspectorate.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- The Inspectorate to schedule a separate meeting with the Applicant, with regards to scoping matters.
- For the Applicant and the Inspectorate to schedule a project update meeting in March.
- The Applicant to send project update meeting presentation to aid meeting note review.
- The Applicant to send S35 request.

