



Meeting note

Project name	River Thames Scheme
File reference	WA020001
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	13 December 2022
Meeting with	The Environment Agency and Surrey County Council
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project Update 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.

Scoping Opinion Feedback

The Environment Agency and Surrey County Council (the Applicant) asked the Inspectorate to comment on some of the approaches to technical points contained within the published Scoping Opinion. A discussion was held to clarify several of the points raised in the Inspectorate's Scoping Opinion. This included clarification around the definition of long-term maintenance (including bed profiling and structural works) and landscape and visual impacts. The Applicant and the Inspectorate also discussed the approach to assessing impacts to air quality from transportation of hazardous material. The Inspectorate explained that any associated traffic movement that is part of the scheme should be appropriately assessed in the Environmental Statement (ES); the Applicant should fully justify their study area and approach to assessment.

The Inspectorate clarified that the ES may present different approaches to those set out in the Scoping Opinion on the basis that they are appropriately justified. Evidence of agreement with relevant consultees should be sought to support the approach taken.

Technical Stakeholder Engagement

The Applicant explained that it has continued to undertake engagement and hold Technical Working Groups with stakeholders. The Applicant noted that feedback and review had been affected by resource issues with some stakeholders, but that no substantial issues had arisen because of this engagement.

Historic England Feedback

The Applicant noted that Historic England had not responded to the scoping consultation following some changes to staff contacts. The Inspectorate explained that HE can submit a late response to the Scoping consultation which would be forwarded to the Applicant and published on the Inspectorate's website. [Post Meeting Note: Historic England did subsequently submit a late scoping response and it was published on the Planning Inspectorate's website].

Non-Statutory Consultation Update

The Applicant has conducted non-statutory consultation from the 8 November to 20 December 2022, where the Applicant hosted 10 in person events, 9 pop-up events and 7 virtual events which attracted over 1200 attendees. The Applicant explained that the consultation included information about a third channel section from Datchet to Hythe End which was previously included in the River Thames Scheme. The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead were unable to raise the funding required to deliver the channel section and as such this cannot be taken forward by the River Thames Scheme. The Environment Agency continues to work with the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead to look at flood management solutions in the area. The Applicant explained that the main concern arose from people living up-stream and down-stream of the Proposed Development who wanted further information about the potential flood risk in the area. The Applicant explained that many people were interested in the new open green spaces and stretches of open water being proposed. The Applicant noted that it intends to engage with community groups, including a community forum, in the run up to, and throughout, its statutory consultation. during (for the purposes of Section 42 of the Planning Act 2008).

The Inspectorate queried whether the Applicant has consulted hard to reach groups such as traveller groups and boating communities. The Applicant explained there is a small traveller site in their Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) boundary and plan to consult them during statutory consultation. The Applicant also explained that there are a few temporary moorings and that they have recruited a community engagement officer.

The Inspectorate queried if the Applicant has involved the Local Authorities (LA) in creating a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG). The Applicant explained that it has co-ordinated with LA's and has service level agreement in place which includes funding for host authorities.

The Applicant noted that some had raised that the maps used during non-statutory consultation were particularly high-level to allow a more strategic focus to the consultation.

The Applicant outlined its next steps to the Inspectorate, which consist of preparing for statutory consultation, ongoing engagement with stakeholders, drafting of the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC), and incorporating EIA scoping feedback. The Applicant explained that the third public consultation is planned to commence in 2023.

Relevance of Water Resources NPS

The Applicant queried the relevance of water resource National Policy Statement, and the Inspectorate advised the Applicant to consult its own legal advice. Currently, the NPS is in draft and a timescale of its adoption in relation to the project timescale is not defined. The Inspectorate advised that it will be up to the Applicant to determine the relevance of the NPS and set out its rationale in its application documents.

AOB

The Inspectorate advised the next held project update meeting with the Applicant could be once they have prepared their Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), in advance of Statutory Consultation which is due to take place in Autumn 2023.

The Inspectorate asked for any updates on Development Consent Order (DCO) submission date. The Applicant explained that it is working towards Q3/Q4 2024 and that it would keep the Inspectorate updated on any changes to this programme.

