



## Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	River Thames Scheme
<b>File reference</b>	WA020001
<b>Status</b>	Final
<b>Author</b>	The Planning Inspectorate
<b>Date</b>	05 December 2023
<b>Meeting with</b>	Environment Agency and Surrey County Council (“The Applicant”)
<b>Venue</b>	Microsoft Teams
<b>Meeting objectives</b>	Project Update Meeting
<b>Circulation</b>	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.

### Welcome, Introductions and Project Overview

The Applicant outlined flooding issues experienced by the local area and associated environmental and economic impacts. The surrounding area features significant infrastructure, including the national highway and rail networks. There is also a demonstrable need for nature recovery. The Applicant explained the project’s location in reference to local communities and other significant features nearby.

The Applicant listed five primary goals of the River Thames Scheme (RTS):

- Reduce flood risk to dwellings, businesses, and infrastructure;
- Provide better access to green open spaces, connection with wildlife and more sustainable travel network;
- Create a network of high-quality habitat and achieve biodiversity net gain;
- Facilitate sustainable and inclusive economic growth; and
- Enable delivery and design that contributes to the achievement of Environment Agency, Surrey County Council and Partner climate goals relating to carbon use.

Seven project components were listed which will form the overall Development Consent Order Application (DCO):

- A new flood channel in two sections, through Runnymede and Spelthorne;
- Capacity improvements to River Thames;
- New green open spaces, with also blue open spaces being considered;
- Priority areas for habitat creation, enhancement and mitigation;
- Active travel provision developments and places for recreational access;
- Utilities and highways alterations and diversions; and
- Temporary construction features.



## **Statutory Consultation Update**

The Applicant outlined engagement to date. Overall engagement began in 2009 in the Lower Thames Flood Risk Strategy Report which identified the opportunities for infrastructure enhancements and improvements. This continued in 2015 and 2016 with stakeholder discussion groups and public consultation. A Section 35 direction was given by the Secretary of State (SoS) in December 2020 which designates the project as development for which development consent is required. A period of non-statutory consultation was held in late 2022 which consisted of 10 in-person events and 7 virtual events. This consultation received 487 responses.

A draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) was issued to Local Authorities (LAs) on 17 October for response by 23 November. The Applicant received a joint response from Surrey County Council, Runnymede Borough, Elmbridge Borough and Spelthorne Borough and is currently working through the provided feedback. Some examples of comments on the draft SoCC relating to outreach and consultation events were shared. The materials planned for use during the Statutory Consultation period were listed, which is planned for early 2024. The Applicant will include a digital Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) amongst the consultation materials which are still undergoing development.

## **Approach to PEIR Assessment**

The Applicant discussed work to date on the PEIR, explaining chosen parameters, assessed effects and assumptions made. The PEIR will assume that waste permits have been obtained as the project cannot progress without these. In consequence, significant effects from waste have been ruled out. The Report will contain feedback from scoping and a preliminary assessment of Local Significant Effects (LSEs) based on a reasonable worst case. A next steps document will be produced to further explain negative environmental effects. The Applicant outlined alternative options considered in the design of the proposed development since the period of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping.

The Inspectorate previously identified 25 effects which were recommended for scoping within the EIA. The Applicant explained why 20 of these had been considered and 5 were not included. It will seek agreement from statutory bodies on this approach. The key potential negative LSEs of each project feature were listed followed by targeted methods of mitigation.

The Inspectorate enquired about the significance of waste permits in relation to the project. The Applicant explained that a number of permits will be needed, primarily depository permits for disposing materials. A dedicated working group has been created to regularly engage with the Environment Agency to reach a clear position on permit agreements.



## **Next Steps/AOB**

The Applicant plans to develop and refine current designs following feedback received from the planned Statutory Consultation in 2024. It aims to develop Statements of Common Ground with key stakeholders and continue discussions with Natural England regarding an informal evidence plan approach for the Habitats Regulations Assessment. The Applicant will communicate timings of the expected draft and final documents submission.