

Environment and Sustainability Committee



Date of meeting 8 March 2022

Title	River Thames Scheme update
Purpose of the report	To agree in principle Service Level Agreements (SLAs)
Report Author	Sandy Muirhead Group Head Commissioning and Transformation
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	N/A
Corporate Priority	Environment
Recommendations	Committee is asked to: To agree to the River Thames Scheme Service Level Agreement in principle and for the signing of the finalised Service Level Agreements to be delegated to the Chair of the Environment and Sustainability Committee and Group Head Commissioning and Transformation.
Reason for Recommendation	The SLA agreements are nearly complete but both need to be signed off as soon as possible so work can progress on the DCO process to meet planned timetables.

1. Key issues

- 1.1 The planned River Thames Scheme (RTS) will reduce flood risk to communities in Surrey and Southwest London. More than 11,000 homes and 1,600 businesses from Staines to Molesey will benefit from reduced flood risk by the development of the scheme across the area, and road, rail, power, and water networks will be more resilient.

In addition to reducing flood risk, the scheme will:

- contribute to a vibrant local economy by providing greater resilience to flooding of homes, businesses, and key infrastructure.
- enhance the social and environmental value of the river
- create new green spaces and recreation such as fishing, boating, and cycling
- The scheme will involve the construction of a new river channel. This will be built in 2 sections at Spelthorne and Runnymede. The scheme will also include capacity improvements to Sunbury, Molesey and Teddington weirs.

- 1.2 A key factor for the River Thames Scheme progressing onto its development was approval by HM Treasury of the outline business case in spring 2021. The project is finalising technical design work and is working towards obtaining the final approvals needed for construction, which on the current planned timetable is likely to commence in 2025/26.
- 1.3 In December 2020, the Secretary of State approved a request for the River Thames Scheme to be designated a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). This means that the project team will apply for permission to build through a Development Consent Order (DCO) rather than individual planning applications.
- 1.4 Spelthorne Borough Council along with Elmbridge, Runnymede and Surrey CC have invested in the development of the scheme to protect our residents from flooding. Spelthorne contributed £196,000 to the scheme's development over 4 years from 2016 to 2020 (£49k/year). The scheme does not now require any further revenue contributions from ourselves. We have committed in the Capital Programme 2021 – 2025, which was approved by Council in March 2021, to investing £1.3M in the construction of the scheme.
- 1.5 Surrey County Council (SCC) is investing £270M in increasing flood resilience across the county. This includes a financial contribution of £237 million to the River Thames Scheme. This contribution along with flood scheme grants from Central Government, the Environment Agency, the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee and others, has enabled the scheme to receive HM Treasury approval to proceed to final design and planning stages.
- 1.6 The River Thames Scheme is being delivered by the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council in partnership with: -
 - Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC)
 - Runnymede Borough Council (RBC)
 - Spelthorne Borough Council (SBC)
 - Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
 - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
 - Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership
 - Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership
 - Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
 - Thames Water
 - Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC)
- 1.7 As the planning aspects involve 4 key authorities (SBC, SCC, EBC, RBC) it has been agreed that the scheme will pay for independent consultants to support the planning authorities in assessing the information being submitted by the applicants for the DCO.
- 1.8 The planning aspect is very important to be involved in and as mentioned in the September 2021 report this requires service level agreements (SLAs) to be drawn up to ensure the planning authorities can cover all aspects of the planning process via the DCO and act independently.

- 1.9 Therefore, the purpose of this report is to seek agreement to those SLA's and for final sign off to be designated to chair of Environment and Sustainability Committee and the Group Head Commissioning and Transformation so we can meet the DCO timetables going forward. The SLAs are almost complete but given the next Environment and Sustainability Committee meeting is potentially nearly 3 months away it is important we progress the SLA's to minimise delays to the scheme as a whole.
- 1.10 There are two SLA's being produced: -
- a) An SLA relating to the proposed River Thames Flood Alleviation scheme which is between SCC/EBC/SBC/RBC and the "applicant" (EA/SCC). This covers the funding mechanisms for the independent consultant to assist the local authority planning teams in assessing the information provided for the DCO. This also involves internal delineations to ensure the planning advice is totally independent from the applicant and identifies RBC as the co-ordinating authority for handling funds/issues with the "applicant".
 - b) An inter authority SLA between RBC and SCC/EBC/SBC. This is to allow RBC to act as co-ordinating authority on behalf of EBC, SCC and ourselves for the management of the independent consultant assessing the DCO information in detail on behalf of our collective planning services, individual authority staff costs and DCO responses.
- 1.11 SBC's involvement in the scheme is important to ensure we maximise benefits from the scheme not only in terms of mitigating flood risk to SBC's communities but also to ensure we maximise other leisure and biodiversity opportunities as part of the scheme.

2. Options analysis and proposal

- 2.1 **Preferred option** The River Thames scheme will provide more protection for residents against major flooding from the Thames. Therefore, it is important Spelthorne continues its commitment to the scheme to maximise benefits to Spelthorne. Signing the SLAs gives security and funding for SBC planners to be fully involved in the DCO process and enables it to submit detailed responses to the planning submissions for the DCO and ensure the scheme is fit for purpose. Therefore, the Committee are asked to delegate the signing of the SLAs to the Environment and Sustainability Committee Chair and Group Head Commissioning and Transformation
- 2.2 Not to be involved (by not signing the SLAs) would limit our influence on ensuring the scheme is developed to meet our residents needs including reduced flooding and provision of biodiversity and leisure opportunities. It is a very Important project to prevent flooding, with the potential for increased risks of flooding with climate change. Also, not to be involved would not be compatible with our priorities in serving the community to ensure the best outcomes on the scheme including biodiversity, recreational opportunities and adaption/mitigation of climate change.

3. Financial implications

- 3.1 In the early stages of development over 4 years (2016-2020) Spelthorne committed £196k of revenue to the scheme and has committed in its capital Programme £1.3M towards the scheme's construction (expected if consents and final Treasury approvals are agreed) around 2025/26.

3.2 There is officer time involved in regular meetings and though much of the assessment of the planning implications will be undertaken by consultants working with the planning authorities there will be a time input required by SBC staff and this is being refined as part of the inter-authority SLA including covering these costs.

3.3 The costs of independent consultants to assist the planning authorities in assessing the scheme in planning terms will be covered by the applicant as per the SLA between the applicant and local authorities.

4. Other considerations

4.1 There will be public consultations on the scheme, and it is expected these will begin in late 22/23.

5. Equality and Diversity

5.1 The scheme itself will not amplify any equality and diversity issues but there will need to be assessments for any associated activities with the schemes e.g., layout of paths or cycleways along the channels.

6. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

6.1 The scheme itself will assist in mitigating the impact of flooding in the Borough which may be exacerbated by climate change. The scheme will be built as sustainably as possible and increase biodiversity opportunities through the creation of wetlands and potentially small woodland and grassland habitats will be incorporated into the scheme.

7. Timetable for implementation

7.1 Commencement of construction if approvals are received should be 2025/26 with an expected 4-year build period so completion by 2029.

Background papers: There are none.