

River Thames Scheme Members' Planning Briefing January 2023

Background

The River Thames Scheme (RTS) extends from Runnymede through Spelthorne Borough and a small part of Elmbridge to the London Borough of Richmond. Many of the properties within the Thames floodplain have experienced repeated flooding, most recently in 2014, and the flooding risk will be exacerbated by climate change.

In response to this, the Environment Agency (EA) and Surrey County Council (SCC) will be submitting a Development Consent Order (DCO) to the Planning Inspectorate in 2024. This is a single application which will cover all boroughs and will seek to obtain permission to construct and maintain a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project.

The RTS is designed to reduce the flooding risks to properties within its floodplain by improving the flow of water downstream. The scheme will involve the construction of a new river channel which will be built in 2 sections at Spelthorne and Runnymede. The scheme will also include capacity improvements within Elmbridge (Desborough Cut) and aims to enhance the natural environment around the river.

Officers at Spelthorne have been working in an internal joint technical group to address local issues raised as the RTS progresses. The group includes Planning DM, Environmental Health (contamination, air quality and noise), biodiversity and climate change. Regular meetings have been taking place, as an Officers Project Group, between the planning officers of Spelthorne Runnymede, Elmbridge and SCC. Stantec, a large international organisation with expertise in infrastructure design and delivery and in the DCO process, is supporting the authorities involved.

A web page providing information on the RTS has been set up here [The River Thames Scheme - RTS - latest - Spelthorne Borough Council](#) This will be updated during 2023/24 by planning officers.

Scoping Opinion

In October 2022, as part of the DCO process, Spelthorne received a consultation by the joint applicants (EA and SCC) on an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Report for the RTS in the Borough.

Scoping is the stage that sets out what needs to be assessed in the EIA to help define how to approach the assessment and what information may be needed to identify the likely significant effects from the development. The EIA will be submitted at a later date as part of the formal planning process which will take the form of an application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) to the Planning Inspectorate.

Officers were required to give feedback by the end of October and Members were advised of this in an email dated 12/10/2022. The consultation was referred to on the weekly publicity schedule of planning applications which all councillors received. The scoping documents were highly technical and the DM planners worked closely within the joint officer technical group and with other planning officers at SCC and Runnymede and Elmbridge Councils. A joint response from Spelthorne, Runnymede, Elmbridge and Surrey CC was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 02/11/22 and is attached as Appendix 1.

Non Statutory Consultation

As part of the DCO process, the applicants undertook an additional (non-statutory) consultation in November 2022. This aimed to gather opinions from the general public, landowners, local authorities, community groups and environmental and regulatory organisations, on the proposals for the RTS. A joint response from Spelthorne, Runnymede, Elmbridge and Surrey CC was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 16/12/22 and is attached as Appendix 2. The response set out a number of principle areas of environmental concern and made several recommendations including advocating further engagement and technical workshops with the Council Officers Project Group to inform on-going design work for the RTS before design work advances.

The technical response to the non-statutory consultation was discussed with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Environment and Sustainability Committee and both expressed support for the approach taken.

Further member planning briefings will be issued during the DCO process.

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