

Environment and Sustainability Committee



23 January 2023

Title	Appointment as member representative to the River Thames Scheme.
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report Author	Sandy Muirhead Group Head Commissioning and Transformation
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	Not applicable
Corporate Priority	This item is not in the current list of Corporate Priorities but still requires a Committee decision.
Recommendations	Committee is asked to: Identify a member representative for the River Thames Scheme for the remainder of the 2023-24 municipal year.
Reason for Recommendation	To ensure that the Council maintains appropriate representation on the River Thames Scheme.

1. Summary of the report

- 1.1 This report seeks the Environment and Sustainability Committee's agreement on a member representative to the River Thames Scheme (RTS). Following approval by Council on 14 December 2023 for the re-allocation of Committee seats after a by-election, the previously appointed representative is no longer on the Environment and Sustainability Committee.
- 1.2 The member appointed will need to attend meetings of the RTS members group to receive updates on the scheme's progress and to report back to Committee on progress with the scheme.

2. Key issues

- 2.1 The River Thames Scheme represents a new landscape-based approach to creating healthier, more resilient, and more sustainable communities by responding to the challenges of flooding, improving access to green open spaces and sustainable travel routes, encouraging inclusive economic growth, and increasing biodiversity. The River Thames Scheme will consist of a new flood channel in two sections, through the boroughs of Runnymede and Spelthorne in Surrey. In addition, there will be increases in capacity at three weirs and the Desborough Cut. There will be new recreation areas for communities and habitat for wildlife.

- 2.2 Further details on the scheme can be found at <https://www.riverthamesscheme.org.uk/>. The whole scheme has involved partnership with Surrey County Council (SCC), Elmbridge, Runnymede, 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, and Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC).
- 2.3 The Council is more involved than some partners as we are part of the project team taking the implementation of the project forward. We are therefore, working closely with the Environment Agency, Surrey County Council, Elmbridge and Runnymede Borough Councils.
- 2.4 The large-scale nature of the project meant the Government directed that it be treated as a “project of national significance” in December 2020. Other examples of projects of national significance might be a wind farm, airport expansion or new rail line.
- 2.5 Projects of national significance require a type of consent known as a 'Development Consent Order' (DCO). A DCO removes the need to obtain many separate consents, including planning permission and is designed to be a quicker process than applying for these separately.
- 2.6 The DCO must be granted before full funding is approved and construction can begin.
- 2.7 Work on the River Thames Scheme has been ongoing for some years with officers and members being involved in moving the project forward from being part funded to a fully funded one so it can progress in line with Treasury and DCO guidelines for large infrastructure projects.

3. Options analysis and proposal

- 3.1 Option 1 **Recommended** To appoint a member representative to attend meetings on behalf of the Council as and when required. This will enable members to be kept updated and be fully aware of the details of the scheme when residents raise queries.
- 3.2 Option 2 Not to agree member representation which would mean Spelthorne would not be “at the table” for ongoing updates on the scheme and ability to provide input when required.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 In the earlier stages of the project, to enable initial development of the scheme whilst seeking full funding, Spelthorne and other Councils made revenue contributions over 5 years. Over 5 years we contributed £295k to the scheme. Additionally, Councils were asked to make a capital contribution to the scheme. This was agreed by Council as a contribution of £1.5M and is set out in the capital strategy.

5. Risk considerations

- 5.1 In any large scheme of this nature there are always risks. Key ones are: -

- that the planning inspectorate refuse the DCO but with the depth of work being undertaken to meet DCO requirements this risk should be minimal.
- Treasury refuse to accept the final business case- the risk has been minimised by ongoing discussions with DEFRA and the Treasury's infrastructure division, so they are fully aware of the scheme and its funding mechanisms.

6. Procurement considerations

6.1 There are none.

7. Legal considerations

7.1 A Service Level agreement has been developed between the key partners to ensure fairness and a mechanism for dealing with any issues between partners should they arise.

8. Other considerations

8.1 There are none.

9. Equality and Diversity

9.1 Design of associated recreational activities and biodiversity will consider equality and diversity to ensure access to all.

10. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

10.1 With changing climate this scheme is an important part for mitigation of climate change effects from flooding but also provides opportunities for biodiversity and recreation contributing to health and well-being.

11. Timetable for implementation

11.1 The member's appointment will be effective on agreement by Environment and Sustainability Committee.

11.2 The DCO should be completed by end of 2024 and then assessed by the planning inspectorate in 2025. If the DCO is approved construction would start in 2026 with completion of the scheme in 2030.

12. Contact

12.1 Sandy Muirhead; s.muirhead@spelthorne.gov.uk

Background papers: <https://www.riverthamesscheme.org.uk>

Appendices: None