

# Environment and Sustainability Committee



27<sup>th</sup> February 2024

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Title</b>                     | Summary of the River Thames Scheme (RTS) Statutory Consultation Project Group's Response (February 2024)  |
| <b>Purpose of the report</b>     | To make a decision  |
| <b>Report Author</b>             | Claire Sorrin Project Manager (Stantec) – Project Group<br>Kelly Walker – Principal Planning Officer<br>Kiran Boparai – Planning Officer  |
| <b>Ward(s) Affected</b>          | All Wards   |
| <b>Exempt</b>                    | No  |
| <b>Exemption Reason</b>          | N/A   |
| <b>Corporate Priority</b>        | Community<br>Environment  |
| <b>Recommendations</b>           | Committee is asked to:<br>Agree the report and Appendix A   |
| <b>Reason for Recommendation</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This report is providing an update on the River Thames Scheme Statutory Consultation and the Project Group's draft response.</li> <li>To agree the Council's response to the Statutory Consultation</li> </ul> |

## 1. Summary of the report

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>What is the situation</b>   | <b>Why we want to do something</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statutory Consultation by the Applicant (Environment Agency (EA) and Surrey County Council (SCC)) on the RTS, as it passes through Spelthorne.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is a statutory requirement for the RTS to be consulted upon prior to the submission of the Development Consent Order (DCO) by the Applicants to the Planning Inspectorate.</li> </ul> |
| <b>This is what we want to do about it</b>   | <b>These are the next steps</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The RTS will result in reduced flooding, environmental improvements including an increase in biodiversity and public open spaces, and improved accessibility to benefit the local community.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To achieve Committee approval of the Statutory Consultation response to the RTS</li> </ul>   |

- 1.1 This report seeks to provide an update to councillors on the River Thames Scheme (RTS), a scheme promoted by Surrey County Council and the Environment Agency (EA) ('the Applicant'). The Statutory Consultation will run from 22 January 2024 – 4th March 2024 and the Project Group's include Surrey County Council, Spelthorne Borough Council, Runnymede Borough Council and Elmbridge Borough Council. The draft response is due on 4th March 2024.

## 2. Key Issues

### Overview of River Thames Scheme

- Creation of a new flood relief channel in two sections through Runnymede (4.8km long) and Spelthorne (3.2 km long). The channels will be formed by connecting together existing lakes and will act as new flow routes for excess water when water levels in the River Thames rise too high.
- Lowering of the river bed downstream of Desborough Cut.
- Improvements to Sunbury, Molesey, and Teddington weirs.
- New green and blue open spaces at a variety of locations.
- New Active Travel Route (ATR) and snaking rampart landform will run for the length of the scheme. Two pedestrian and cycle bridges are proposed to cross the River Thames at Chertsey and Desborough Island to facilitate this connection.
- Biodiversity net gain (BNG), and carbon neutral construction.

### Need for the Scheme

- Flood defence and resilience is severely lacking along the stretch of the River Thames between Egham and Teddington, resulting in it being the largest area of populated but undefended floodplain in England.
- Due to the landscape being dominated by major infrastructure and mineral workings the open space available is not utilised effectively, and therefore risk of flooding in this area is very high.

### History of Scheme/Background

- 2.1 In 2009, a consultation on the Lower Thames Risk Management Strategy was held by the EA. This strategy was agreed in 2011 with a recommendation for the RTS. Planning and design commenced in 2014 under Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (TCPA) regime and the first public consultation was held in 2016. In December 2020, the Government declared that the RTS is a project of national significance and therefore requires a Development Consent Order (DCO) under the Planning Act 2008.
- 2.2 A second non-statutory consultation took place over a 6-week period in Nov-Dec 2022. The Project Group raised a number of key concerns around use of landfill sites, movement and management of materials, road traffic emissions during the construction phase, constant supply of water in the new channels, landscape design (landforms up to 15m in height), open space proposals

/recreational uses and the potential impact on existing and proposed ecological areas.

- 2.3 As part of the DCO process and Statutory Consultation, the Applicant must engage with the Host Authorities (the Project Group and London Borough Richmond upon Thames and London Borough Hounslow) on its Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC), which was undertaken in July 2023 to work with the Applicant to provide a consultation that is tailored to the local community and stakeholders.
- 2.4 Since the launch of the Consultation, Stantec (environmental advisors to the Project Group) and the Project Group have been reviewing the Statutory Consultation documents, which include:
- Consultation brochure
  - Map book
  - Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)
  - PEIR: Non-Technical Summary (NTS)
  - Flood Modelling Report NTS
  - Integrated Scheme Description
  - Response to Matters Raised
  - Environmental Design Principles
  - Feedback Form
  - Environmental Effects of the RTS - Next Steps
  - Statement of Community Consultation (SOCC); and
  - Second Consultation Summary Report (2023).

### **3. Options, analysis, and proposal**

- 3.1 It is acknowledged that the flood defence and resilience is severely lacking along the stretch of the River Thames between Egham and Teddington. The proposal of creating a flood relief channel to achieve flood alleviation and climate change adaptation solutions, whilst providing a new landscape-based approach to creating healthier, more resilient and more sustainable communities is supported in principle.
- 3.2 The review process on the details of the scheme is still being undertaken. However, a number of draft key concerns have been identified:
- Lack of detail regarding preferred strategy for the scheme
  - Missing information / lack of information
  - EIA process
  - Methodology
  - Matters scoped in / out of assessment
  - Additional receptors to be assessment
  - Mitigation
  - Contradicting Statements
  - Landscape design
  - Ferris Meadow Lake
  - Risk of contamination
  - Transport
  - Maintenance; and
  - Programme

A summary of the Project Group's response to the RTS Statutory Consultation is attached as an Appendix. A full response will be submitted and issued to the Applicant on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

#### **4. Financial management comments**

- 4.1 The Council has approved as part of Capital Programme in 2021, a figure of £1.3m which is the commitment agreed with the RTS. This is reflected in the Council's Capital Programme.
- 4.2 In addition, Spelthorne has 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 SBC.
- 4.3 The Project Group which has been dealing with the planning and technical aspects of the scheme has been assisted by environmental advisors at Stantec. This service has been, and continues to be, funded by the Applicant under a Service Level Agreement (SLA). This is at no cost to the Project Group at the Council. However, there are a number of Officers across the Council including from Development Management, Environmental Health and Sustainability who have been involved with meetings, engagement and providing responses.

#### **5. Risk management comments**

- 5.1 Audit has advised that the scheme should address climate change and flood risks. In response, it is advised that the River Thames scheme seeks to reduce the flooding risks to residential properties within Spelthorne and adjoining River Thames authorities. If this scheme is not delivered in accordance within the timescale set down which the applicant states is by 2026, there is a real risk that flooding of Spelthorne properties will reoccur in the near future.

#### **6. Procurement Comments**

- 6.1 There was a procurement process undertaken by the Project Group which resulted in the appointment of Stantec as advisors to the group.

#### **7. Legal comments**

- 7.1 Sections 42 and 43 of the Planning Act 2008 and the associated Regulations and Guidance require local authorities to be consulted on nationally significant infrastructure projects as part of the application for a Development Consent Order.

#### **8. Other considerations**

- 8.1 No other considerations are to be taken into account, other than those in this report and the attached document.

#### **9. Equality and Diversity**

- 9.1 The RTS will help to improve equality and diversity for the local community, as it will primarily reduce flood risk to people and properties in the Borough, enhance accessibility by providing paths, bridges, public open spaces and improvements to the environment.

#### **10. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications**

10.1 The proposal will have many environmental benefits for the local community and beyond, including reducing flood risk, provide habitats for wildlife, increase access to green spaces and a sustainable travel route, enhanced biodiversity and carbon neutral construction.

## **11. Timetable for implementation**

11.1 The Statutory consultation ends on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024 and our response must be submitted to the Applicant by then. The RTS will be consented through a Development Consent Order (DCO) which will be submitted directly to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) by the Applicants. It is anticipated this will occur early next year (2025).

## **12. Contact**

12.1 Please contact:

- Kelly Walker – Principal Planning Officer. [k.walker@spelthorne.gov.uk](mailto:k.walker@spelthorne.gov.uk)
- Kiran Boparai – Planning Officer. [k.boparai@spelthorne.gov.uk](mailto:k.boparai@spelthorne.gov.uk)

**Background papers: There are none.**

### **Appendices:**

**Appendix A – Summary of RTS Statutory Consultation Project Group's Response (February 2024)**