



# **Preliminary Environmental Information Report**

## **Volume 2**

### **Chapter 20: Stakeholder Engagement**

## 20 Stakeholder Engagement

### 20.1 Introduction

- 20.1.1.1 Consultation with public bodies, businesses and residents has been ongoing since 2009 when the Lower Thames Flood Risk Management Strategy (LTFRMS) set out recommendations for the River Thames Scheme (RTS) ('the project').
- 20.1.1.2 Since before the Secretary of State's Direction under section 35 of the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008) in December 2020, the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council embarked on a strategy to 'consult regularly, welcome feedback and provide clear evidence of how this was used in our design'. This strategy included a 'working with others' approach to ensure effective engagement on the project by working through the following iterative steps:
- WHAT do you want to achieve?
  - WHY work with others?
  - WHO do you need to work with?
  - HOW will you involve them?
  - DELIVER – let's do it!
  - EVALUATE - how did it go and what did we learn?
- 20.1.1.3 Following a direction from the Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Scheme has been designated a project of national significance for which development consent is required. As such, the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council will be required to submit an application for a Development Consent Order (DCO).
- 20.1.1.4 The Scope and design of the project that will be submitted for the DCO application and assessed in the Environmental Statement (ES), will be shaped by technical, environmental and economic factors alongside feedback from engagement with stakeholders and received through pre application non-statutory and statutory consultation, further to the applicant's duties under sections 42 to 49 of the PA2008.

20.1.1.5 This chapter provides an overview of:

- Pre-application Consultation; and
- Development Engagement

## 20.2 Pre-application Consultation

20.2.1.1 During the pre-application stage of the DCO process, the project has undertaken two phases of non-statutory consultation (in 2016 and 2022) with prescribed stakeholders and communities on the plans for the RTS.

20.2.1.2 The second public consultation on the RTS was undertaken for six weeks from 8 November 2022 to 20 December 2022 (hereafter referred to as 'the second public consultation'). This gave stakeholders and communities an opportunity to learn about the RTS and provide input. Ten public information events were held at locations close to the RTS and an additional seven virtual events were held for those who could not attend the public information events in person; including a specific virtual event for the island communities. The public information events and supporting virtual events attracted approximately 1,180 attendees. 487 responses were received during the consultation period, with responses covering a range of topics including access related matters, design suggestions and further consideration to be given towards technical aspects such as reduction of flood risk and improvements to flood flows. The summary report for this consultation can be found on the project website [www.riverthamesscheme.org.uk](http://www.riverthamesscheme.org.uk). The key findings from the summary report include for example:

- The majority of respondents supported the idea of lowering the riverbed near Desborough Cut, (55 per cent agreed/strongly agreed, 20 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed, 18 per cent indicated they did not know and 4 per cent disagreed/strongly disagreed).
- Asked to rank their preferences for access to green spaces, connection to wildlife and a more sustainable travel network, most respondents viewed access to new green spaces as most important, with connection to wildlife second.
- There were also several open questions about proposals for Desborough Cut, access, connecting with wildlife and sustainable travel networks within the project area; as well as how to balance these factors and the approach to construction.

20.2.1.3 In line with the statutory requirements of the PA2008, its associated regulations and Planning Inspectorate (PINS) Advice Notes Two, Three and Fourteen this current statutory consultation will ensure:

- Section 42(1)(a) prescribed consultees are consulted. These consultees are those set out in Schedule 1 of the Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009 where they are identified by name or by category;
- Section 42(1)(b) local authorities (categories A, B, C and D) are consulted.
- Section 42(1)(c) - the Greater London Authority is consulted;
- Section 42(1)(d) - all land interests in the categories listed in section 44 of PA2008 which have been identified by the project are written to; and
- Non-statutory consultees have been identified with ongoing engagement and collaborations happening with them.

20.2.1.4 The project has over 250 organisations identified as stakeholders, and thousands of affected individuals from a range of interests. These include statutory authorities, landowners and operators, environmental groups and businesses.

20.2.1.5 As required by s47 PA2008, we have published a Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC). It sets out how we propose to consult people living in the vicinity of the land about the proposed application. The content of the SoCC is summarised in Section 21.1 of our PEIR.

20.2.1.6 All comments from statutory consultation will be reviewed and analysed to understand key themes and concerns. They will be incorporated into the Consultation Report, which will be submitted with the DCO application (in accordance with s37(3)(c) PA2008). The report will state how changes have been made in response to feedback received and where this information can be found in the DCO application documentation (in the ES for example). It will also explain why it has not been possible to make the changes suggested, where applicable. This report will be made available on the project website [The River Thames Scheme](#).

## 20.3 Development Engagement

20.3.1.1 Section 20.3 of the RTS Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Report (Environment Agency and Surrey County Council, October 2022) ('the EIA Scoping Report') details past engagement through the development phases of the RTS, including a summary of the broad range of engagement methods used.

20.3.1.2 Topic specific engagement that occurred prior to EIA Scoping is summarised in the individual topic chapters of the EIA Scoping Report.

20.3.1.3 Stakeholder engagement relevant to individual environmental topics that has occurred since EIA Scoping is covered in individual topic chapters of this Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR).

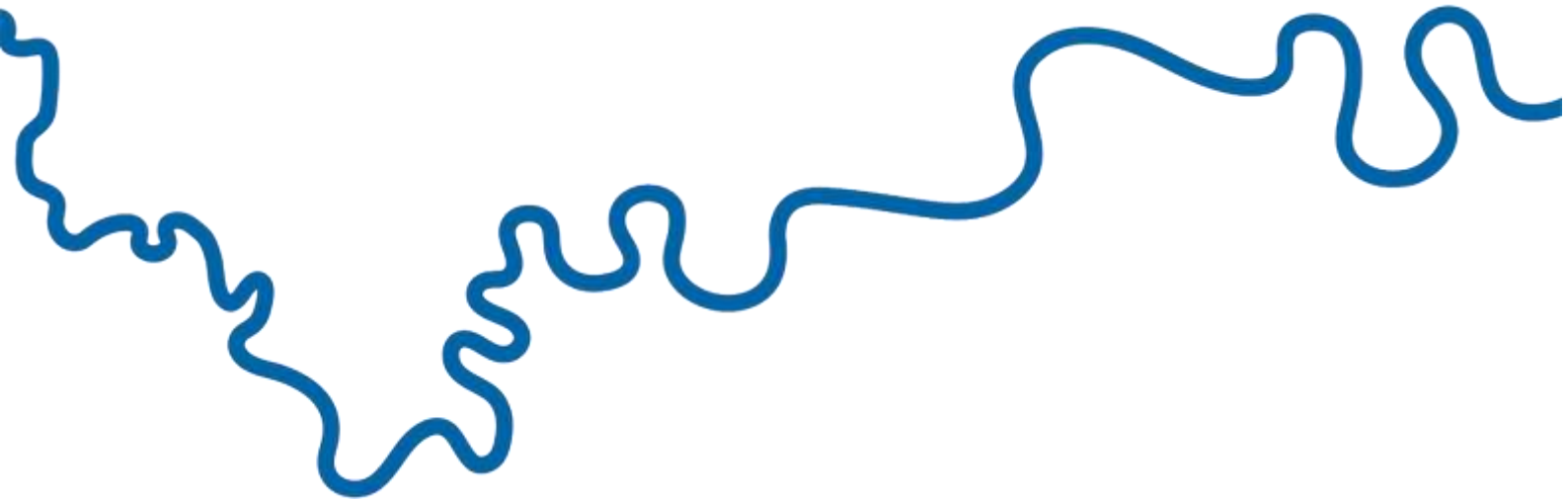
20.3.1.4 Substantial engagement has continued with multiple stakeholders across a range of topics prior to, during and since our EIA Scoping Report including:

- Online EIA Scoping briefing sessions were held with statutory consultees such as Historic England, Natural England, Affinity Water, Thames Water, LPAs and the Marine Management Organisation in September and October 2022.
- The Planning Inspectorate (PINS) EIA Scoping Opinion (dated 15 November 2022) ('the PINS Scoping Opinion'), included feedback from several statutory consultees (see Appendix 4.1 of our PEIR). A meeting was held between the project team and PINS in December 2022 to clarify some points in relation to the PINS Scoping Opinion.
- Landscape and Green Infrastructure design optioneering workshops were held in person with LPA Technical Officers, LPA Councillors, and special interest groups in February 2023, and follow up workshops were held with the LPA Technical Officers in August 2023 to inform the ongoing design work.

20.3.1.5 Targeted engagement on specific topics has also continued since EIA scoping. This engagement is described in the relevant subsection of each topic chapter (sections Air Quality 6.3.2 to Water Environment 18.3.2). Certain examples include:

- Liaison on the nature and effects of the proposed augmented flow is ongoing with key interests including Thames Water and Affinity Water.
- The design and management of structures that cross the flood relief channel is being developed through meetings with National Highways, local highway authorities, Network Rail and private landowners.
- Whilst water quality assessments are ongoing, an optioneering study is also being undertaken to consider alternative solutions (if needed) for the routing of the Spelthorne Channel given the use of Ferry Lane Lake (also known as Ferris Meadow Lake) for open water swimming.
- Since the second public consultation, regular monthly coordination meetings are held with the LPA Project Group, to provide updates on the programme and discuss issues. These have been supplemented throughout 2023 with a series of additional meetings focusing on specific topics including materials, design, Landscape and Green Infrastructure consultation.
- Community engagement has been undertaken via responses to email enquiries, face to face and virtual meetings and with key community stakeholder groups via Community Working Groups. The purpose of the community engagement has been to engage key stakeholder groups ahead of this statutory consultation. This engagement focused on facilitating engagement and activate debate, with the aim of increasing understanding amongst the groups themselves and providing feedback on their issues to the project. There was no fundamental change to the assessment methodology of the PEIR because of comments received and discussed in the community engagement.

20.3.1.6 Stakeholder engagement to date has informed the proposed design, construction and operation of the RTS. These are set out in section 4.5 and 20.4 of the EIA Scoping Report and in the relevant subsection x.3.2 of each topic chapter of our PEIR.



The River Thames Scheme represents a new landscape-based approach to creating healthier, more resilient and more sustainable communities by reducing the risk of flooding and creating high quality natural environments.