



Environment and Transport Select Committee
13 March 2014

Briefing: River Thames Scheme

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of policy

The report supports a verbal presentation to the Committee on the River Thames Scheme from the Environment Agency. It provides an overview of the scheme as the basis for discussion.

Introduction:

1. Residents and businesses in Surrey have been affected by major flood incidents. As recently as December 2013 to February 2014, storms delivered a combined and cumulative rainfall that had significant impacts on Surrey. There were multiple severe flood warnings. Over this period 1,000 people were evacuated and internal property flooding was recorded at approximately 20 sites throughout the county. Over 8,000 homes in Surrey were without power.
2. The Environment Agency is working in partnership with the local authorities in the area to develop the River Thames Scheme (hereafter the Scheme). It will deliver significant economic, social and environmental benefits alongside the reduction in flood risks including new wildlife habitats and areas for sport and recreation. The shared vision for the Scheme is:

'protecting our communities; securing our economy; enhancing our Thames'.
3. The Scheme includes large scale engineering work, provision of local flood protection and improved flood incident responses. It is a multimillion pound economic infrastructure scheme. It would reduce flood risk in some Surrey communities.
4. The area to be defended is a portion of the area included in the Lower Thames Flood Risk Management Strategy 2011. A map of the area in question is provided at appendix 1.

The River Thames Scheme

5. The Scheme will deliver the recommendations set out in the Lower Thames Flood Risk Management Strategy, which was developed by the Environment Agency in consultation with other public bodies, businesses and residents in 2009. The strategy was approved and published in 2011.
6. The Scheme is proposed in the largest undefended floodplain in England. It is a multimillion pound economic infrastructure scheme. There are currently 15,000 homes and businesses in areas at risk from flooding from the River Thames between Datchett and Teddington with a 1 in 100 (1%) or greater chance of flooding in any given year. Of these, 6,000 are at a significant risk – more than 5% chance of flooding in any given year.
7. Flood risk is particularly concentrated along the River Thames and where the tributaries meet in the towns of Datchet, Wrasbury, Staines, Chertsey and Shepperton. In addition, critical infrastructure is also at risk, including A roads and M25 junctions, water abstraction plants and electricity sub-stations.

Scheme components

8. The Scheme consists of large scale engineering work to construct a flood channel as well as improvements to three of the Thames weirs, provision of local flood protection for up 1,500 individual properties and improved flood incident response plans. The flood channel will be between 30 and 60 metres wide and 17 kilometres long (built in 3 sections). When implemented, the scheme will provide improved standard of protection for 20,000 properties.

Scheme Phases

9. The scheme has been divided into two phases:
 - 9.1 Phase 1 includes all preparatory work to secure planning consents, property level protection measures, major incident planning, development of a funding strategy, securing government assurance and approvals and construction of capacity improvements at the three weirs (Teddington, Sunbury and Molesey).
 - 9.2 Phase 2 includes detailed engineering design for the flood channel, structures & Desborough cut, securing full planning permission and consents and construction of the capacity improvements.

Scheme Costs & Delivery

10. The Scheme is newly noted as a pipeline project in the draft Enterprise M3 Strategic Economic Plan. The Scheme is provisionally estimated at £256 million (present value cost, 2009 prices) with potential contribution of £136m from Defra Grant-in-Aid, with the expectation that the remainder should be found locally.

11. The Environment Agency is progressing Phase 1 with support from the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee's local levy funding.
12. The Environment Agency states at this stage the exact timings to carry out the Scheme are uncertain. However, its aim is to start the capacity improvements to the Thames weirs within three years and the construction of the channel within six years. The construction period for the flood channel could be five to six years.

Governance arrangements

13. Working in partnership is key to the success of the Scheme. A programme board is overseeing the delivery of the Scheme. Membership of the board includes representatives from:
 - Environment Agency
 - Elmbridge Borough Council
 - Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
 - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
 - Runnymede Borough Council
 - Spelthorne Borough Council
 - Surrey County Council
 - Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
 - Defra.
14. Surrey County Council is working with the Environment Agency and relevant local authorities to progress implementation of the Scheme. Chief Executives of each of the local authorities have joined a steering group. Given its cross-boundary nature, the Head of Planning at Surrey County Council and a working group made up of key planning officers from each of the local authorities, are helping the Environment Agency to form an approach to planning.

Conclusions:

15. Surrey County Council will continue to work with the Environment Agency to implement the River Thames Scheme. It is important that this scheme is managed as a programme of dependent projects; otherwise there is a risk of compromising the scheme objectives.

Recommendations:

16. The Committee is recommended:
 - a) To note and comment on the partnership arrangements for the River Thames Scheme.
 - b) To support the need for central government to review current funding arrangements and recognise the national significance.

Next steps:

Report contacts:

Lesley Harding, Sustainability Group Manager

Contact details: Tel: 020 8541 8091

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Map of the River Thames Scheme, study area (Datchet to Teddington).

Sources/background papers:

[Lower Thames Flood Risk Management Strategy 2011.](#)