



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

River Thames Scheme
Environment Agency and Surrey County Council
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

Our reference: BS25374

19 December 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

I write in response to the initial non-statutory public consultation on the River Thames Scheme (RTS) by the scheme partners the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council.

The floods in 2013/14 were an awful demonstration of the extent of the flood risk that residents and businesses in Runnymede and Weybridge and neighbouring areas face each year, as we are located on one of the largest undefended floodplains in the UK. In response, the Government committed to taking action, and the resulting River Thames Scheme will be the largest and most ambitious infrastructure project Defra has undertaken. With investment of £500 million from both central Government and Surrey County Council, the River Thames Scheme will help protect our homes, businesses, and communities for generations to come. Getting it built as soon as possible has been among my top priorities over the last three years; working alongside DEFRA and HM Treasury, as well as the Environment Agency, Surrey County Council, our local borough councils and local resident groups to help drive this forwards. The River Thames Scheme has the potential to provide more than just flood defences, it will also improve local infrastructure and green spaces, protect and enhance local biodiversity and provide many jobs during its construction.

It is absolutely right that every opportunity is taken to receive input from the public when designing these defences, as they in turn will help to shape our communities. I therefore welcome this non-statutory consultation that has afforded local residents their first chance to comment on and shape the scheme and the benefits it can deliver for our communities.

Ensuring delivery, minimising delays

I welcome the extent to which this scheme would mitigate a large amount of the flood risk faced by so many of my constituents who live alongside or near the River Thames, as well as its tributaries such as the Bourne, Wey and Abbey rivers, and water sources like the Meadlake Ditch during non-main river/tributary flood incidents. Many residents have told me of their wish to ensure that the scheme progresses as quickly as possible without delay. While a project of this size is understandably complex and will take time to deliver, there is already significant frustration that it is not expected to be completed until fifteen years since the 2014 floods. This timescale must not be delayed further. I would welcome any possibility for looking at ways to ensure the necessarily rigorous process for submission of the Development Consent Order (DCO) and ultimate approval from the Secretary of State for DEFRA is pursued as quickly as appropriate.

Mitigation

I strongly welcome the fact that plans for the River Thames Scheme make clear nowhere will be put at increased risk of flooding from any part of this scheme. Areas of flood risk either side of Runnymede and Weybridge will either benefit from flood alleviation or lock and weir improvements, in addition to the significant alleviation benefit this would bring to residents of Egham, Egham Hythe, Staines, Thorpe, Chertsey, Laleham Reach and Weybridge.

Greener, better infrastructure

Access to outdoor space and activities is important to a fit and healthy lifestyle, and I am pleased this is facilitated within the plans. Active travel, access to open space, protection of the environment and focus on climate change, wetlands and biodiversity, and sympathy towards local heritage has characterised the working processes of the River Thames Scheme team to date. These considerations are clearly bonuses alongside the primary focus of the flood alleviation benefits, and offer a chance to improve and protect our beautiful riverside landscapes in Runnymede and Weybridge.

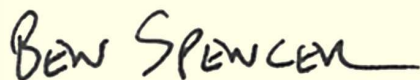
I hope that the new planned walking and cycle routes will be able to support my aim, and that of Runnymede Council, for a network of routes that would enable residents to walk and cycle from the north of Runnymede through the borough to Weybridge, without having to walk along roads – something that is not currently possible.

Continued engagement

The nature of these works that will form part of the DCO and associated planning applications should always be done with sympathy and consideration of the concerns of local residents, not only those who live near our rivers, but the many thousands who use these areas for work, leisure, volunteering and community work, providing so many physical, mental, economic and wellbeing benefits.

I look forward to the feedback from residents and key local stakeholders that will be provided by this non-statutory consultation and how this can be incorporated into the Scheme's design and processes. I note there will be further opportunities for residents to have their say through the statutory consultation processes due to begin next year. I look forward to continuing to work with the River Thames Scheme team and its partners to drive forward this incredibly important project and get it in place, working and protecting residents while enhancing our local natural environment.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Ben Spencer MP
Runnymede and Weybridge

Cc: Katie Stewart, SCC and Julia Simpson, EA