

The River Thames Scheme (RTS) and its impact on Lower Sunbury

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE ATTENDING THE RTS CONSULTATION ON 19 FEBRUARY AND/OR RESPONDING TO THE RTS SURVEY.

- The RTS is a proposed major engineering project by the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council to reduce the risk of flooding along the Thames between Egham and Teddington. In summary, the RTS proposes that two relief channels be constructed – one through Runnymede (between Egham Hythe and Chertsey), and one through Spelthorne (between Littleton North Lake and the Desborough Cut).
- It also includes capacity increases downstream of the Desborough Cut and at the weirs at Sunbury, Molesey and Teddington. **In particular this means a substantial 12m wide, 75m long and 5m deep cut through Sunbury Lock Ait opposite Kings Lawn.**
- In addition to the main proposals, there are plans to create new green open spaces and a new or improved “active travel” route, i.e. a pedestrian/cycle pathway, involving two new bridges, at Chertsey and Desborough Island.
- The RTS proposals include the lowering of the riverbed by an average of 70cm along a 1km stretch of the river, from the downstream end of the Desborough Cut to just downstream of Walton Marina. However there are no proposals to reintroduce dredging of the river, a practice that was abandoned many years ago. It is not unreasonable to expect that the benefit of the riverbed lowering will diminish over time.
- Planning and design work on the RTS started in 2014, following the severe flooding in January of that year - although consultations on the so called Lower Thames Flood Risk Management Strategy started back in 2009. In recent years, the need for a solution has become increasingly urgent as our winters have become wetter and we endure increasingly damaging seasonal storms, culminating in the flooding of this January which has been almost as severe in some places as seen in 2014.
- As proposed, the RTS provides **little obvious benefit to Lower Sunbury** from a project already estimated to cost £640m. The graph on the RTS website showing the reduction in expected flood levels at various places along the affected route shows significant reductions (over 30cm, and up to 90cm) between the Bell Weir at Runnymede and Shepperton Lock - but only 4-8cm downstream of Sunbury Lock, an insignificant reduction given the known increase in river levels during flood conditions.
- **The proposed “cut” across Sunbury Lock Island has significant implications.** Quite apart from the visual damage it is likely to cause to this

iconic stretch of river, it will clearly result, at times of high water levels, in a considerable increase in water flow in the area of Kings Lawn. There is no information provided by the RTS on the likely effect of the increased flow. Indeed they have yet to decide on whether the additional weir will comprise two or three gates. As for its visual impact, at 4,500 cubic metres, it will be almost as large as the interior volume of Big Ben...

- The RTS's own Preliminary Environmental Report admits that there will be a negative effect on the Lower Sunbury Conservation Area. With regard to the "permanent effect on setting" it states that "**Modern structures at Sunbury Ait will affect the views across the river from the Conservation Area.**" (LOSRA's emphasis) It says in the next box, somewhat disturbingly, that "*No mitigation is considered necessary to reduce negative effects to an acceptable level.*"
- An obvious comparison with the RTS is **the Jubilee River flood relief scheme** which opened in 2002. This diverts water from the Thames upstream of Maidenhead and rejoins the river downstream of Windsor. When the Jubilee River is activated there are regular complaints of consequential flooding downstream in Datchet, Wraysbury, Staines and Chertsey. It is reasonable to ask whether the RTS will not increase rather than decrease the risk of flooding downstream of Walton, i.e. in Sunbury and Hampton.
- One of the benefits that the RTS is promoting to local residents along the route is the improved "active travel" route, i.e. a combined cycle/pedestrian path. However this ends at Walton Bridge and there is no similar benefit for Lower Sunbury residents because the tow path here is on the South bank. **An obvious solution would be for our proposed, and well supported, pedestrian/cycle bridge in Lower Sunbury to be incorporated into the project.** LOSRA will be lobbying hard for this and it is essential that individual residents who agree with us give supportive feedback during the RTS consultation period.

As part of the RTS's consultation with local residents along the route, a "**consultation event**" is to be held **at the Hazelwood Centre on Monday 19th February, between 1pm and 7pm.** We encourage anyone with an interest in this important subject to attend. It is an ideal opportunity to **let the promoters of the RTS know your views on incorporating a Sunbury bridge into the Scheme and on the proposed cut across Sunbury Lock Ait.**

*Lower Sunbury Residents Association (LOSRA)
February 2024*