

East Reading Mass Rapid Transit Scheme

ES Addendum Non-Technical Summary

On behalf of **Reading Borough Council**



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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This document is the Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of an Environmental Statement (ES) Addendum prepared in respect of a planning application for a new mass rapid transit (MRT) scheme to the east of Reading, Berkshire (referred to as 'East MRT' or the 'proposed development'). The project is being promoted by RBC, working with WBC, and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVB LEP).
- 1.1.2 The purpose of the East MRT scheme is to provide a high-speed public transport, cycle and pedestrian route into the town centre.
- 1.1.3 A Full Planning Application was submitted for the proposed development in July 2017 and included an Environmental Statement (ES) to present the findings of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- 1.1.4 Following the submission of the planning application for the proposed development there have been responses received from consultees. The proposed scheme design has been amended to address these responses.
- 1.1.5 This Environmental Statement (ES) Addendum has been prepared by Peter Brett Associates LLP (PBA) on behalf of RBC to assess any new or different likely significant effects of the amended scheme design.

1.2 Proposed Development

- 1.2.1 The proposed development comprises the construction of a segregated fast-track public transport route, pedestrian and cycle bridge over the River Kennet, with associated Public Right of Way (PRoW) links, junction improvements and landscaping. The purpose of the East MRT Scheme is to improve the attractiveness of travelling more sustainably, therefore reducing private car trips, easing forecast congestion and air quality along the existing highway network, particularly on the A4 corridor.

1.3 Purpose of this Report

- 1.3.1 This ES Addendum is being submitted voluntarily to provide further information during the determination period of the planning application under Regulation 22 of the EIA Regulations 2011 (as amended).
- 1.3.2 In response to post-submission consultation the scheme design has been amended and further information is being provided. The further information also considers any updates to the baseline conditions, local planning policy and committed development since the 2017 ES.
- 1.3.3 The scope of this ES Addendum was discussed and confirmed with RBC and WBC planning officers through meetings and correspondence
- 1.3.4 The ES Addendum has been prepared to document the assessment of any new or different likely significant effects associated with the proposed amended scheme, compared to those reported in the 2017 ES.

1.4 Terms and Definitions

1.4.1 As per the 2017 ES the following terms are defined and are used throughout this Addendum, unless the context dictates otherwise:

- The application site: the area within the planning application boundary East Reading Mass Rapid Transit scheme;
- The proposed development – the development for which full planning permission is sought;
- East Reading Mass Rapid Transit scheme (abbrev. East MRT Scheme) – the name of the development;
- TVP P&R– the boundary of the Thames Valley Park Park and Ride Site;
- Combined site - refers to the collective area of both the application site and the TVP P&R;
- The 2017 Planning Application (Refs: 171108 and 172048) - the full planning application submitted for the proposed East MRT Scheme; and
- The proposed amended scheme – the amended scheme in response to consultation, and as per the design revisions explained in **Section 2**.

2 Changes Since the 2017 ES

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 This section explains the proposed development in further detail, and highlights updates in relation to the context of the scheme for consideration within the ES Addendum. This includes updates in relation to the environmental context of the site, local and national planning policy, and committed developments in proximity to the application site.

2.2 Baseline Conditions

- 2.2.1 Baseline conditions and the application site's environmental setting have not materially changed since the 2017 ES was prepared, with the exception of SSE works, and updates to TVP P&R.

SSE Works

- 2.2.2 SSE will be undertaking work to divert underground cables in close proximity to the southern boundary of the application site, including works to excavate a cable trench. The majority of the works are within the application site. A review of the SSE proposals has concluded that the works are compatible with the proposed East MRT alignment and the diverted SSE Cable. SSE have confirmed that no existing trees will be removed as part of these works.

TVP P&R

- 2.2.3 Vegetation removal and ground clearance works have begun on site for the TVP P&R site in accordance with the TVP P&R full planning permission.
- 2.2.4 As noted in Chapter 2 of the 2017 ES, the TVP P&R is located to the south of the River Thames and to the west of Thames Valley Business Park, adjacent to the north and east of the proposed East MRT scheme at its junction with the TVP roundabout.
- 2.2.5 The TVP P&R was granted full planning permission in October 2016. In response to the EIA Scoping Opinion, the 2017 ES considered the likely significant cumulative effects of the East MRT with the TVP P&R development. As per the 2017 ES this is provided within a discreet section within each of the topic chapters in this ES Addendum.
- 2.2.6 Site clearance works have been undertaken on the TVP P&R site. In addition, an Ecological Mitigation and Monitoring Plan was submitted and approved in February 2018 (WBC Ref: 180405) to discharge planning 'Condition 15 Ecology'. A meeting with WBC (15.03.18) confirmed that work is currently scheduled to start on site in September or October 2018.

2.3 Updated Planning Policy

Overview

- 2.3.1 This section outlines the relevant changes to updated national and local planning policy which is relevant to the proposed development. In summary the planning policy context is broadly the same as at the time of submission (July 2017), though noting the following emerging policy updates.

Draft Revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2018)

- 2.3.2 A revised draft NPPF was released for consultation on 5th March, and will be open for consultation until May 10th 2018. This is a consultation draft to the NPPF (2012) and therefore

holds limited weight in planning terms at this time and does not materially affect the assessment. The 2012 NPPF has therefore continued to be referred to.

RBC Local Plan (emerging)

- 2.3.3 The new emerging RBC Local Plan has progressed slightly since July 2017, although the overall programme has been delayed. A further round of consultation was held on the Pre-Submission Draft from November 2017 to January 2018, and adoption is now expected in early 2019 (previously expected in autumn 2018). The Plan is not adopted policy and still holds only very limited weight as it did at submission. Therefore, the ES Addendum continues to refer to the Core Strategy, Sites and Detailed Policies Document and Central Area Action Plan as the main RBC policy documents.

WBC Local Plan Update (emerging)

- 2.3.4 The emerging WBC Local Plan Update is still in preparation with consultation on Preferred Options expected in summer 2018. Therefore, the ES Addendum continues to refer to the adopted WBC Core Strategy (2010) and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014).

2.4 Updated Committed Developments

- 2.4.1 The EIA Regulations require the assessment to consider the likely significant effects of the proposed development in the context of other local major developments likely to come forward, as well as cumulative effects that may result from the proposed development and these other developments.

Committed Developments

- 2.4.2 An updated review has been undertaken of major extant or submitted planning applications in the vicinity of the application site. It is worth noting that the search performed included a 1km radius from the edge of any part of the site, as to capture all major developments in close proximity to the application site.
- 2.4.3 Each of the topic chapters has then reviewed this schedule of developments and has undertaken a further cumulative assessment of the likely significant effects of the combined development with these other major local developments. The level of detail for these cumulative assessments has been tailored to the topic and effects under consideration.

2.5 Consultation responses

- 2.5.1 Following the submission of the planning application for the proposed development there have been responses received from consultees and interested parties including: Scottish and Southern Electric (SSE), Network Rail and the Environment Agency (EA). A summary of consultation is included in **Appendix 2-3** of the ES Addendum and consultation with the EA is summarised below. Other consultation is discussed in further detail in the technical chapters of the ES Addendum.
- 2.5.2 Subsequent meetings have been held with RBC and WBC planning officers to discuss the consultee feedback and the design evolution for the proposed scheme. The proposed scheme design has been amended to address these responses.
- 2.5.3 The existing moorings between the Kennet Mouth and the proposed new riverbank works are on land in 3rd party ownership (Wokingham Borough Council and Reading University). The existing moorings at Kennet Mouth are planned to be repaired, by a third party separate to this

planning application, to full functionality (a section of the existing river wall in this location has partially failed).

2.6 Revisions to The Proposed Development

- 2.6.1 Since the submission of the 2017 Planning Application (Refs: 171108 and 172048), and following post-submission consultation, a number of changes have been made to the proposed scheme.

Application Description

- 2.6.2 As per the submitted July 2017 planning application the development comprises the following:

“Construction of a segregated fast-track public transport, pedestrian and cycle bridge, comprising concrete bridge structure with a river span of 59.5m and a land span of 316m, supported by concrete columns and reinforced soil embankment, with associated footpath links, junction improvements and landscaping.”

- 2.6.3 The application remains as described in the submitted 2017 ES but with the following design changes:

Width and Alignment

- Viaduct to narrow by 1 m to the east of the River Kennet (avoiding Network Rail land) with narrow foundations for the SSE cable to be located north of structure;
- Minor realignment to south of Tesco (west of the River Kennet) due to SSE cable undergrounding; and
- Removal of Tesco car park extension.

Columns

- Viaduct to be constructed with a single-column design (instead of the two-column design in the original submission).

Lighting

- Low-level parapet lighting of the viaduct (which removes the need for lighting columns).

Landscape and Ecology

- Retention of the Willow tree at the Kennet Mouth;
- Provision of three new short-stay visitor mooring platforms with associated riverside planting (marginal shelf);
- Omission of proposed green panels, ‘feding’ (fencing made up of living plants) and reclaimed boats which were previously proposed in the landscape design;
- Potential for fencing to be installed beneath the viaduct, if required in the future (details would be agreed at the relevant time);
- Areas of marshy wetland and grasses beneath the viaduct;
- Relocation and repair of mosaic (and storyboards in public realm area); and
- Additional ecological mitigation measures.

Flood Compensation

- Amendments to flood compensation.

- 2.6.4 These design changes are described in further detail within the revised drawings and Design and Access Statement.

3 ES Addendum Scope

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 This section explains the rationale for the scoping of this ES addendum, following the summary of the proposed scheme amendments in response to consultation in **Section 2**.

3.2 Scope of this ES Addendum

- 3.2.1 As explained in **Section 2.5** above the scheme design changes include amendments relevant to the surface water drainage design, the landscape strategy and design, and ecological mitigation and enhancement proposals. Therefore, these topics have been scoped in and further assessed in the ES Addendum:

- Hydrology and the Water Environment;
- Landscape and Visual (inc. lighting); and
- Ecology.

- 3.2.2 **Table 3.2** below considers the other topics assessed in the 2017 ES and explains why they have been scoped out of this ES Addendum.

Table 3.2: ES Addendum Topics Scoped Out

Chapter Nos. 2017 ES	Title of ES Chapter	Explanation of why topic is scoped out
7	Socio-Economics	Specific design changes will not have an impact on the overall proposed operation of the scheme, and the East MRT will deliver minor beneficial employment effects over the construction and operational phases as per the 2017 ES. The scheme still seeks to achieve its key aims (as detailed in Section 3.1 of the 2017 ES). There are no new or different likely significant effects. Therefore, it is not considered that further assessment in relation to socioeconomics is required.
8	Transport and Access	There are proposed changes to the design of the proposed development but these will not, materially, change the operation of the scheme as a transport link, and there are no new or different likely significant effects. Therefore, further assessment of the scheme in relation to transport is not required. The Transport Statement Addendum will include additional clarification in response to consultee feedback, including new alignment drawings, justification for loss of car parking at Tesco and for the reduction in footway/cycleway to the east of the River Kennet.
9	Air Quality	The proposed use of the scheme and transport modelling outputs will remain the same. The proposed construction of the scheme will, largely, remain the same and mitigation measures as per the 2017 ES will be implemented.

Chapter Nos. 2017 ES	Title of ES Chapter	Explanation of why topic is scoped out
		It is considered that no further work is required to assess air quality based on the scope of the proposed amendments and that there are no new or different likely significant effects.
11	Ground Conditions	As per the 2017 ES the proposed intrusive investigation works and mitigation measures will be adopted and some minor beneficial effects are likely to be realised associated with a reduction in contaminant load if remediation is undertaken. The proposed design changes will not change the potential direct and indirect effects of the ground conditions and on ground sustainability, and there are no new or different likely significant effects. It is therefore considered that no further work is required based on the scope of the proposed amendments.
14	Archaeology and Heritage	It is considered that the proposed amendments are not likely to significantly alter the findings of the ES chapter submitted with the original application in relation to archaeology and heritage. There are no new or likely different significant effects and further assessment is therefore not required.

4 Assessment of Effects

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 This chapter summarises the findings of the ES Addendum. Effects have been considered during the construction and operation of the proposed development, as well as considering effects in combination with the approved TVP P&R scheme.

4.2 Hydrology and the Water Environment

- 4.2.1 A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) Addendum was completed to include scheme amendments. The FRA Addendum concluded that the users of the proposed scheme will be safe and there will be no increase in flood risk elsewhere; thus, meeting the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Residual effects associated with the development, during both construction and operation phase, have been categorised as **Not Significant**.
- 4.2.2 A Water Framework Directive (WFD) Compliance Statement Addendum has been compiled to accompany the planning application. This concludes that the proposed works will not detrimentally impact the WFD potential of nearby designated surface water bodies, will not impede their ability to achieve good ecological potential, and will not prevent against achieving WFD and River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) objectives. The scheme is therefore compliant with WFD, with residual effects of the construction and operation phase being categorised as **Not Significant**.
- 4.2.3 The inclusion of riverbank improvements in the amended scheme will result in an improvement to the local ecology in relation to existing receptors, and will therefore have a localised **Minor Beneficial** effect with regards to WFD.
- 4.2.4 The combined site (MRT East and Thames Valley P&R) has been assessed with regard to hydrology, flood risk, surface water drainage and the potential effects on the WFD. The residual effects of the construction and operational phases are assessed to be **Not Significant**.
- 4.2.5 The inclusion of riverbank improvements is the cause for beneficial residual effects.

4.3 Landscape and Visual

- 4.3.1 The Lighting Assessment provided in the 2017 ES has been updated, in addition to Landscape and Ecology Strategy, the Arboricultural Impact Assessment, and Arboricultural Management Strategy. There are no new or different likely significant effects from external lighting compared to those reported in the Chapter 12 of the 2017 ES and therefore lighting has been scoped out of further consideration within this ES Addendum.
- 4.3.2 There have been no changes to policy context or methodology since the 2017 ES. The only change to the baseline is vegetation removal and ground clearance works which have begun for the TVP P&R site. That vegetation removal is part of the approved TVP P&R scheme and was already accounted for in the 2017 ES assessment.
- 4.3.3 Following comments and responses from the consultation period for the 2017 Planning Application (Ref: 171108), the primary mitigation measures and enhancement proposals, in relation to landscape and visual aspects, were amended to:
- Retention of existing trees and vegetation where practicable (a greater number of trees have been identified for retention due to the removal of replacement car parking at Tesco's);

- Re-routing of services and utilities to the south of the proposed MRT, to enable replacement tree planting to take place to the north of the MRT;
 - Height of the proposed bridge element to correspond to that of the Listed railway and accommodation bridge;
 - Low-level parapet lighting which removes the need for lighting columns;
 - Planting of new native trees and shrubs;
 - Selective management and re-planting of the Coal Woodland;
 - Retention and enhancement / extension of the existing area of Acid Grassland at the western end of the MRT East route, with scattered new tree planting to create a glade with dappled shade;
 - Mooring enhancement with associated new marginal shelf and riverside planting in front of the existing concrete retaining wall at the edge of the River Thames (east of Kennet Mouth);
 - Creation of tussocky grassland between the River Thames and the MRT, and wildflower hydro-seeded grassland on the MRT embankment, marshy areas created beneath the viaduct and new marshy planting including Loddon Lily;
 - One-column viaduct design and viaduct narrowed by 1m to the east of the River Kennet, with narrowed foundations;
 - Relocation and repair of the existing mosaic, provision of new seating and storyboards in public realm area (public information);
 - Willow tree T88 east of the Kennet Mouth retained and additional 3 trees retained to the east of the River Kennet.
- 4.3.4 Residual landscape effects, for all periods of assessment and for Scenario 1 and Scenario 2, remain as assessed and reported in Chapter 12 of the 2017 ES. There are no new or different significant landscape effects, compared to the 2017 ES.
- 4.3.5 Residual visual effects for the representative viewpoints, for all periods of assessment and for Scenario 1 and 2, also remain as assessed and reported in Chapter 12 of the 2017 ES. Residual visual effects for the sequential viewpoints along a 1.2 km section of the Thames Path National Trail, during construction and on completion, remain as assessed and reported for Scenario 1 and Scenario 2 in Chapter 12 of the 2017 ES.
- 4.3.6 However, in both Scenario 1 and Scenario 2, residual visual effects on sequential views for VPB (eastwards) and VPB and VP3 (westwards) at the 15 years after planting assessment period, are reduced from a major to severe level of significance in the 2017 ES to a major level of significance. This reduction arises from additional tree retention, including the Willow tree T88 east of the Kennet Mouth and trees near to the east of the River Kennet, which help to filter views of the MRT; and the new marginal shelf with native riverside edge planting, which creates a more natural river edge, providing visual enhancement of, and better connection with, the River Thames.
- 4.3.7 Residual visual effects at 15 years after planting on other sequential views remain as assessed and reported in Chapter 12 of the 2017 ES.
- 4.3.8 No new or different cumulative landscape or visual effects have been identified in comparison to the 2017 ES.

4.1 Ecology

- 4.1.1 The addendum assessment has been informed by an updated site walkover survey, completed in March 2018. This identified that the majority of the TVP P&R site (and therefore the eastern extent of the application site / combined site) had been cleared in accordance with the P&R planning permission, resulting in 0.85 ha of dense scrub, calcareous grassland and plantation being removed. However, all of the habitat types identified previously remained present, and their intrinsic ecological value had not changed. Furthermore, the value of the application site / combined site to protected species, and the populations of those species known to use the application site / combined site, was not anticipated to have significantly changed.
- 4.1.2 Of the scheme design changes proposed, the removal of the car park extension (resulting in a smaller area of The Coal, Kennet Mouth and Kings Meadow East LWS being removed than at the time of the 2017 Planning Application (Ref: 171108)) and the use of low-level lighting of the viaduct were identified to have the potential to result in material changes to the impact assessments previously undertaken for The Coal, Kennet Mouth and Kings Meadow East LWS and bats. As such, they were subject to update assessments.
- 4.1.3 The updated assessments concluded that the scheme design changes are not anticipated to result in a material change to the impact assessments as provided within the Ecology Chapter of the 2017 ES; therefore, there are no new or different likely significant effects when compared to the assessment and reporting in Chapter 13 of the 2017 ES.
- 4.1.4 Although no significant residual effects on important ecological features are anticipated to arise as a result of the proposed development once operational, the proposed development will deliver a suite of ecological mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures to ensure:
- compliance with planning policy requirements of no net loss in biodiversity and net gain where possible; and
 - compliance with relevant wildlife legislation.
- 4.1.5 To ensure compliance with planning policy requirements, high-quality biodiverse habitat will be installed within the application site. Further to this there will be improved habitat management practices and supplementary planting within the off-site portion of The Coal, Kennet Mouth and Kings Meadow East LWS and other nearby locations.
- 4.1.6 To ensure compliance with relevant wildlife legislation, a detailed Ecology Mitigation Strategy will be secured by planning condition. This will include appropriate working methods and timings, as well as detailed mitigation strategies for reptiles and bats.
- 4.1.7 Once operational, habitat associated with the proposed development will mature into biodiverse habitat of value to protected and notable species, as well as being of intrinsic ecological value in its own right. Ultimately, the proposed development presents the opportunity to deliver a net gain in biodiversity.

4.2 Impact Interactions

- 4.2.1 Any new or different direct and indirect effects of the proposed development have been summarised above. This section summarises the potential for impact interactions.

- 4.2.2 There are no changes to the construction of the proposed scheme and there are therefore no changes to the conclusions of the impact interactions in the 2017 ES.
- 4.2.3 In light of the proposed amended scheme and the assessment of operational effects above, it is considered that overall that there are no changes to the conclusions of the impact interactions in the 2017 ES for the operation of the scheme.