

East Reading Mass Rapid Transit Scheme

Consultation Statement

On behalf of **Reading Borough Council Highways and Transport Department**



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Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Overview	1
1.2	Site Location and Proposed Development	1
1.3	Project Overview	2
1.4	Structure of Report	2
2	Consultation Activities	3
2.1	Introduction	3
2.2	Consultation with RBC and WBC	3
2.3	Public Exhibition	4
2.4	Consultation with Design South-East	6
2.5	Consultation with Other Stakeholders	6
3	Consultation Feedback.....	8
3.1	Introduction	8
3.2	RBC and WBC Feedback.....	8
3.3	Public Exhibition Feedback	13
3.4	Design South-East Feedback.....	18
4	Consultation Outcomes.....	21
4.1	Introduction	21
4.2	Principle of Development	21
4.3	Design	21
4.4	Environmental Assessment.....	21
4.5	Summary	21
5	Conclusion.....	23

Figures

Figure 1-1 Site Location (showing indicative route)	1
Figure 3-1 Category of Respondents	13
Figure 3-2 Responses to 'Would you use the proposed scheme?'	13
Figure 3-3 Responses to Mode of Use.....	14
Figure 3-4 Responses to Purpose of Use	14
Figure 3-5 Responses to 'During which time do you envisage using the MRT, walking and cycling route?'	14
Figure 3-6 Responses to 'Do you currently use the existing towpath?'	15
Figure 3-7 Responses to 'Should the MRT scheme include any recreation and leisure facilities along the route?'	16
Figure 3-8 Respondents Concerns	17
Figure 3-9 Respondents Suggestions	17

Appendices

Appendix A	Invitation Letter to Public Exhibition
Appendix B	Public Exhibition Poster
Appendix C	Distribution Area for Public Exhibition Publicity
Appendix D	Press Release
Appendix E	Exhibition Location Map
Appendix F	Exhibition Information Boards
Appendix G	Exhibition Feedback Form
Appendix H	Briefing Note to Design South-East
Appendix I	Design South-East Response

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1 Introduction

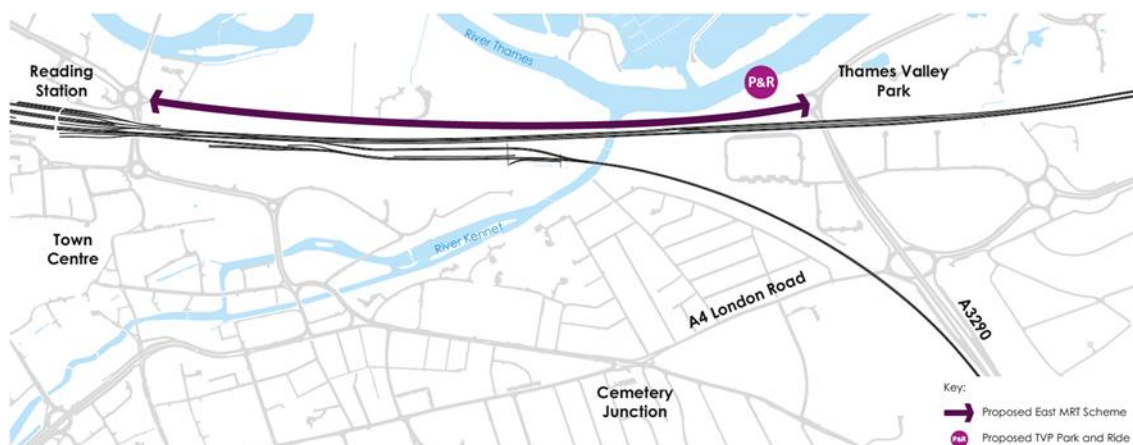
1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 This Consultation Statement has been prepared by Peter Brett Associates LLP (PBA) on behalf of Reading Borough Council (RBC) Highways and Transport Department ('Applicant') in support of a full planning application for the East Reading Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) scheme.
- 1.1.2 The Consultation Statement describes the pre-application consultation process undertaken by the Applicant, prior to submitting a full planning application for the proposed East Reading MRT scheme. The consultation process has informed the planning application submission and complements the statutory consultation process that will be undertaken by the local authority following the registration of the planning application.
- 1.1.3 This Statement is submitted as part of a package of documents to support the planning application submission.

1.2 Site Location and Proposed Development

- 1.2.1 The application site is located at land between Thames Valley Business Park and Napier Road, Reading, to the south of the River Thames and north of the Great Western Main Line Railway.

Figure 1-1 Site Location (showing indicative route)



- 1.2.2 The description of development for which full planning permission is sought at the application site is:
- "Construction of a segregated fast-track public transport, pedestrian and cycle bridge and viaduct, comprising concrete bridge structure with a river span of 59.5m and a land span of 316m, supported by concrete columns, steel beams and reinforced soil embankment, together with new footpath links and existing footpath alterations, replacement supermarket car parking provision, junction improvements and landscaping."*
- 1.2.3 The proposed development straddles the two Local Planning Authority areas of RBC and Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), and therefore duplicate planning applications will be submitted to both RBC and WBC for determination.
- 1.2.4 A full description of the site location and proposed development are set out in the Planning Statement.

1.3 Project Overview

- 1.3.1 The East Reading MRT scheme offers a segregated fast track public transport, pedestrian and cycle route that will support enhanced accessibility and continued sustainable growth in Reading, Wokingham Borough and the wider area. The overall purpose of the East Reading 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.
- 1.3.2 The scheme will seek to achieve the following key aims:
- Provide a sustainable alternative solution to accommodate future travel demand on the London Road corridor;
 - Increase capacity for movement of people thereby reducing journey times and forecast congestion, as well as improving reliability of journeys along the corridor;
 - Support economic development in Reading Town Centre, east Reading, Wokingham and within the Thames Valley;
 - Develop a high quality, sustainable system which provides a sustainable alternative to the private car;
 - Facilitate a future MRT network for Reading and the Thames Valley; and
 - Allow access for mobility impaired and pushchairs.
- 1.3.3 The route of the East Reading MRT scheme itself is proposed to link the A3290 at Thames Valley Park, adjacent to a proposed new Park & Ride facility, to Napier Road, Reading town centre and the railway station.
- 1.3.4 This proposal is being promoted by both RBC, working with WBC and Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVB LEP), as it will help to relieve congestion and improve air quality along the A4 corridor and will improve economic efficiency through the enablement of shorter journey times. The scheme is a long established element of RBC's strategy to deliver economic growth and housing for Reading and has been included in RBC's three Local Transport Plans and Core Strategy. The scheme is also an identified priority in WBC's adopted Core Strategy, Managing Development Delivery, Local Plan, and Local Transport Plan.

1.4 Structure of Report

- 1.4.1 This Consultation Statement is structured as follows:
- Section 2 provides a description of the consultation activities undertaken;
 - Section 3 summarises the pre-application consultation feedback received;
 - Section 4 explains the approach taken to respond to consultation feedback and how feedback has influenced the final development proposals; and
 - Section 5 provides an overall summary and conclusion to the report.

2 Consultation Activities

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 Prior to the submission of a planning application, the Applicant has engaged in a lengthy period of pre-application discussions with RBC and WBC planning officers, local residents, Design South-East and key stakeholders, in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement of both RBC and WBC. These discussions have informed the final submitted development proposals at the application site. This chapter provides a summary description of the pre-application consultation activities undertaken.

2.2 Consultation with RBC and WBC

Pre-Application Discussions

- 2.2.1 On behalf of the Applicant, PBA submitted an initial request to planning officers at RBC and WBC in May 2016, to commence early discussions regarding the proposed East Reading MRT scheme. Accordingly, on 17th May 2016, an initial introductory meeting was held with RBC and WBC planning officers and transport officers to provide an introduction to the project and discuss the overarching planning strategy. The discussions focussed on:

- Project background;
- Planning application considerations;
- Development proposals;
- Environmental assessment;
- Public consultation and stakeholder engagement; and
- Project management.

- 2.2.2 A formal pre-application enquiry was subsequently submitted to RBC and WBC planning departments on 16th June 2016, comprising a completed pre-application enquiry form, site location plan, proposed highway layout plan, indicative viaduct plan and supporting covering letter. The submitted enquiry requested advice on the detailed design, environmental assessment and mitigation, planning strategy and submission requirements.

- 2.2.3 Further meetings were subsequently held with planning officers of RBC and WBC in July 2016 and November 2016 to discuss the evolving development proposals in more detail. The discussions focussed on:

- Development proposals update;
- Key design considerations;
- Environmental assessment and EIA Scoping;
- Public consultation and stakeholder engagement, including public exhibition;
- Planning application preparation; and
- Project management.

2.2.4 More recently, a follow-up meeting was held with RBC and WBC planning officers in May 2017 to discuss detailed design elements of the proposed development and the future planning submission. The discussions focussed on:

- Project updates;
- Scheme design updates;
- Landscape strategy;
- Application site boundary;
- EIA scenarios and cumulative developments;
- Application submission documents;
- Planning conditions and obligations; and
- Design South-East review.

2.2.5 A summary of the feedback provided by RBC and WBC at the above pre-application meetings is provided below in chapter 3.

EIA Scoping

2.2.6 As a result of initial pre-application discussions, together with initial design work and site assessment, it was acknowledged that the proposed development has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, and therefore an EIA has been undertaken to inform the proposed development.

2.2.7 A scoping request letter was submitted to both RBC and WBC on 11th August 2016, addressing the intention to undertake an EIA to be documented in an ES. The scoping letter was supported by a scoping report, which has set out information on the application site and the proposed development, the topics to be assessed as part of the EIA, the methodology for assessment and the rationale for those topics to be scoped out of the EIA.

2.2.8 The scoping request was reviewed and consulted upon by RBC and WBC with statutory consultees and key stakeholders prior to issue of formal EIA Scoping Opinions on 25th November 2016 (RBC) and 23rd December 2016 (WBC) respectively.

2.2.9 A summary of the feedback provided within the EIA Scoping Opinion is contained with chapter 3.

2.3 Public Exhibition

2.3.1 As part of the pre-application process, a public exhibition was held at the Waterside Centre, Thames Valley Park Drive, on Tuesday 19th July 2016, between 1pm and 7pm. The purpose of the exhibition was to allow members of the public and other stakeholder and interested parties to view plans and provide comments on the latest development proposals.

2.3.2 In advance of the exhibition, a letter was distributed to approximately 3,000 homes and 77 local businesses within the vicinity of the application site inviting residents and occupiers to attend. In addition, posters advertising the event were distributed to approximately 160 local community facilities (doctor's surgeries, dental practices, pharmacies and chemists, churches, sports centres, local primary and secondary schools, local community centres and community groups)

within a wider radius of the application site. The letters (Appendix A) and poster (Appendix B) were distributed one week prior to the public exhibition.

- 2.3.3 The area in which letters and posters were distributed is shown in Appendix C. The letter distribution area was defined in order to target residents and occupiers within closest proximity of the application site and likely to have an interest in the proposed development; with posters distributed within a wider radius of the application site to maximise publicity across the local area.
- 2.3.4 In addition, a press release (Appendix D), outlining the development proposals and inviting local residents and businesses to attend the exhibition, was issued by RBC on 8th July 2016, for circulation to local news agencies and publication on the Council's website.
- 2.3.5 The public exhibition event itself was held on Tuesday 19th July 2016 between 1pm and 7pm at the Waterside Centre, Thames Valley Park Drive, Earley, RG6 1PQ. The Waterside Centre was chosen as it is easily accessible and close to the eastern end of the proposed East Reading MRT route. The opening hours of the exhibition were designed to provide opportunity for all visitors to attend. The location of the Waterside Centre is shown in Appendix E.
- 2.3.6 At the event a number of information boards (Appendix F) were also displayed providing information regarding the proposed development, in respect of:
- What is the East Reading Mass Rapid Transit Scheme?
 - Wider Transport Connectivity;
 - Route Selection;
 - Preferred Route;
 - Benefits; and
 - FAQs.
- 2.3.7 Attendees were encouraged to review the information boards, discuss the proposals with the project team and provide comments by completing and returning a feedback form (Appendix G), or by responding to the project email address: readingeastmrt@peterbrett.com.
- 2.3.8 The feedback form and information boards were also published on RBC's website for those not able to attend or wishing to provide feedback after the public exhibition.
- 2.3.9 The feedback form invited responses to the following:
1. *Would you use the proposed scheme?*
 2. *If yes, how would you use the proposed MRT scheme?*
 3. *During which time do you envisage using the MRT, walking and cycling route?*
 4. *Do you currently use the existing towpath?*
 5. *Do you have any opinions on how the MRT route and bridge could be designed to blend into its environment?*
 6. *Do you have any opinions on how landscaping could be used to soften the appearance of the MRT route?*

7. *Should the MRT scheme include any recreation and leisure facilities along the route?*
8. *Do you have any general comments on the proposals?*

2.3.10 A full summary of the feedback received at the event is provided in chapter 3 below.

2.4 Consultation with Design South-East

2.4.1 During pre-application discussions with RBC and WBC planning officers (as explained further below), it was recommended that the proposed development was presented to Design South-East for an independent design review prior to submission. Accordingly, a panel review day was arranged with Design South-East to be held on 6th June 2017.

2.4.2 In advance of the review, a Briefing Note (Appendix H) was circulated to panel members of Design South-East to provide an overview of the project, outline the site and planning context, advise of pre-application discussions, outline the proposed development and explain the design rationale. The Briefing Note was accompanied by plans of the proposed development, landscape strategy and artist impression drawings. A list of 6 specific discussion questions were set out within the Briefing Note based on key design aspects and to direct feedback from Design South-East:

1. **Context:** *Is the design approach based upon a thorough understanding of the nature of the site and its wider context?*
2. **Bridge:** *Is the design of the bridge and its approaches of sufficient quality; is it both appropriate and responsive to the setting?*
3. **Visual impact:** *Does the scheme succeed in minimising visual impact overall; has the appearance of the scheme in key views been carefully considered?*
4. **Public realm:** *Has the opportunity been taken to improve the surroundings, make it safer and more appealing to use by the public; and better connected?*
5. **Materiality:** *Are the proposed materials and details of sufficient quality; are they appropriate to the context; has maintenance, durability, and sustainability been considered; will the materials age well?*
6. **Landscape:** *Is the approach to landscape design appropriate, of sufficient quality, does it satisfactorily mitigate impacts and enhance the setting overall; and are the proposals clear and sufficiently detailed?*

2.4.3 The panel review day itself comprised a site visit along the proposed route of the East Reading MRT scheme followed by a presentation and discussion with panel members of Design South-East. The review was attended by members of the project team and planning officers from RBC and WBC.

2.4.4 A formal response from DSE was provided on 16th June 2017 (Appendix I) which is addressed in further detail in chapter 3 below.

2.5 Consultation with Other Stakeholders

2.5.1 The project team has undertaken ongoing discussions with technical officers at RBC and WBC, statutory consultees and other key stakeholders throughout the pre-application phase, in order to inform the EIA and final development proposals. A summary of consultation on specific detailed issues is outlined where relevant within the ES submitted as part of this planning application.

- 2.5.2 RBC has also undertaken ongoing discussions with relevant landowners regarding necessary land acquisition and will continue to do so following planning submission.

3 Consultation Feedback

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The pre-application consultation activities undertaken by the Applicant have provided detailed feedback to inform the final submitted development proposals. This chapter provides a summary of the consultation feedback received.

3.2 RBC and WBC Feedback

Introduction Meeting (17th May 2016)

- 3.2.1 Prior to the submissions of a formal pre-application enquiry, an introductory meeting was held with RBC and WBC planning officers on 17th May 2016 to outline the East Reading MRT scheme proposals. The feedback provided by RBC and WBC planning officers and key outcomes is summarised below.

3.2.2 Planning Application Considerations

- A formal pre-application enquiry would be submitted to RBC and WBC in June 2016 for further discussion;
- The planning application boundary would be drawn according to the planning status of the proposed TVP P&R development. Planning conditions attached to any consents for the proposed TVP P&R development and proposed East Reading MRT development would be reviewed in advance and drafted appropriately to enable separate submissions; and
- It was confirmed that RBC would be the lead determining authority.

3.2.3 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

- It was acknowledged that an EIA would be required for the proposed East Reading MRT scheme; however, it was agreed that an EIA Screening Opinion would be sought for the proposed development followed by an EIA Scoping Opinion as required. The EIA boundary would include the entire East Reading MRT route from Napier Road to the TVP roundabout;
- RBC/WBC requested that the cumulative effects of the proposed development with other developments in the wider locality were assessed, particularly in relation to new residential and commercial developments;
- New climate change data and official flood data from the EA was being reviewed to inform the proposed development. It was noted that flood compensation will require careful consideration in the proposed design; and
- A tree survey and assessment would need to consider the number of trees along the route that would need to be removed.

3.2.4 Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

- It was agreed that a public exhibition would be arranged for July 2016, with exhibition boards and questionnaire prepared and to be made available on RBC's website; and

- It was recommended that the proposals were submitted to Design South-East for review.

3.2.5 Design

- It was agreed that the design and landscaping of the proposals needs to be carefully considered;
- The proposals should successfully emphasise the social and environmental benefits (leisure, recreation and health) of the East Reading MRT as well as emphasis on the economic benefits;
- Emphasis should also be made on 'place making' as well as biodiversity improvements to highlight that the scheme will be providing a 'sustainable link';
- It will be necessary to demonstrate the East Reading MRT proposals will not have an 'urbanising effect' on the River Thames;
- Consideration needs to be given to layout and design both in terms of opportunities for improvement to the public realm as well as the physical form of the bridge and its supporting structure. The elevated sections of the East Reading MRT would need to be softened by landscaping as well as architectural features;
- The East Reading MRT route and surrounding land would require provision of some visual interest, for example: attractive landscaping features, plantation of new trees, shrubs, fauna and flora; provision of park benches, a trim trail, interpretation boards, picnic tables and observation decks;
- Any lighting along the route should be low level or built into the road surface. A lighting assessment will need to accompany the application;
- The design should consider the potential for attracting sheltering and antisocial behaviour beneath the viaduct and bridge; and
- It was queried whether the road surface of the scheme should be permeable to allow flood water to pass through.

3.2.6 Use of the East Reading MRT route

- The proposed development should consider the type of buses that can use the route. Consideration should also be given to the separation of the bus, cycle and footway either through physical barriers; different surfaces levels; or heights.

Pre-Application Meeting (23rd June 2016)

3.2.7 Following submission of a pre-application enquiry on 16th June 2016, a subsequent meeting was held with RBC and WBC planning and technical officers on 23rd June 2016. The feedback provided by RBC and WBC and key outcomes is summarised below.

3.2.8 Planning Application Considerations

- It was agreed that a full detailed application would be submitted in order to provide sufficient information to address key issues;
- The application will be submitted to both RBC and WBC for determination at individual planning committee meetings; and

- It was noted that the TVP P&R application should be determined prior to the submission of the East Reading MRT application.

3.2.9 Design

- It was noted that the route alignment could not be moved closer to the railway due to the listed bridge and Network Rail access;
- It was queried whether shared uses could be accommodated to reduce width. It was debated whether the cycle lane could be retained on the bridge but combined with pedestrian use in other sections. It was noted that there would be a shared single lane over the bridge to reduce visual impacts in this area;
- It was confirmed that footpath links to the towpath were not proposed due to flood compensation concerns;
- It was debated whether SSE high voltage cables could be attached to the road structure;
- Concerns raised regarding the loss of trees around Tesco car park and the listed bridge;
- Confirmed that lighting would be required along the route for transport uses, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists;
- It was recommended that greening/landscaping was used to soften the impact of the bridge;
- It was recommended that the gradient of the route decreases as soon as possible with a level path connection to the towpath; and
- It was noted that the area beneath the viaduct could not be blocked off entirely due to flood risk issues, however cylindrical columns and anti-graffiti materials could be used to limit concerns.

3.2.10 Environmental Impacts

- Noise issues were considered unlikely due to the adjacent railway and lack of nearby receptors;
- Confirmed that no significant archaeological issues are anticipated; and
- Advised that the scheme should demonstrate no net loss of biodiversity, which may include a requirement for off-site mitigation.

3.2.11 Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

- It was confirmed that the public exhibition would be held on 19th July 2016;
- It was agreed that follow-up topic engagement would be arranged as required with relevant officers at both RBC/WBC; and
- It was recommended that the proposals were submitted to Design South-East for review.

Pre-Application Meeting (3rd November 2016)

3.2.12 A follow-up pre-application meeting was held with RBC and WBC planning officers on 3rd November 2016 in order to discuss updates regarding the proposed development. The feedback provided by RBC and WBC and key outcomes is summarised below.

- The feedback received at the public exhibition on 19th July was discussed and analysed;
- It was debated whether a further public consultation event should be undertaken;
- It was noted that the EIA Scoping Opinion would be issued shortly following the TVP P&R determination;
- It was agreed that the proposals would be submitted to Design South-East for review in due course;
- The visual benefits to the area of removing the pylons was acknowledged;
- EIA should consider impacts of vehicle lights; and
- The design should aim to avoid using column lighting along the length of the route.

Pre-Application Meeting (16th May 2017)

3.2.13 Most recently, a follow-up meeting was held with RBC and WBC planning officers in May 2017 to discuss detailed design elements of the proposed development and the future planning submission. The feedback provided by RBC and WBC and key outcomes is summarised below.

3.2.14 Design

- Concerns regarding the potential landscape impacts of providing access to the Dreadnought;
- Concerns regarding proposed boat storage and location at a pinch-point in the route close to the towpath. Its appearance could create an urbanising effect at a sensitive part of the landscape, particularly given that the area would not be in use most of the time;
- The bridge should be of a subtle design that is not readily visible as far as possible. A 'less is more' / subtle design approach should be taken;
- Queried whether a 'rusty' design could be considered at the balustrade on top of the bridge rather than galvanised steel, and whether the weathering steel girder could be designed with less visual impact;
- The bridge should consider reflecting design elements from the horseshoe bridge;
- Queried whether a lower bridge had been considered that swings out/up;
- Queried the height of the bridge and the minimum height required for navigation;
- Concerns raised regarding the pinch-point in the route close to the towpath; and
- Design approach should seek to prevent use of the structure for sheltering.

3.2.15 Landscape Strategy

- Support for the inclusion of boat planters, seating and green panels; and
- Proposed trim trail equipment should be excluded due to its urbanising effect and the limited need.

3.2.16 Application Site Boundary

- Application red line boundary should include the road up to TVP roundabout to provide certainty regarding its delivery;
- Agreed that the red line boundary would not include the proposed junction improvements at the western end of Napier Road; and
- Agreed that the red line boundary would also not include the potential Dreadnought access or off-site mitigation areas.

3.2.17 EIA

- Confirmed that minor amendments to the proposed EIA boundary appeared acceptable;
- Agreed that assessment of noise impacts would be incorporated within the ecology assessment rather than within a full standalone noise assessment; and
- Queried whether a bird strike management plan was being prepared.

3.2.18 Planning Conditions / Obligations

- S106 Heads of Terms should include delivery obligations, management, maintenance and Employment Skills Plan;
- Conditions would be dependent on the amount of information submitted with the application; and
- Agreed that conditions could be separated or make reference to the existing TVP P&R conditions.

EIA Scoping

3.2.19 A scoping request letter was submitted to both RBC and WBC on 11th August 2016, setting out the proposed topics to be assessed as part of the EIA and the methodology for assessment. The scoping request was reviewed and consulted upon by RBC and WBC prior to issue of formal EIA Scoping Opinions on 25th November 2016 (RBC) and 23rd December 2016 (WBC) respectively. The feedback provided by RBC and WBC and key outcomes is summarised below.

- EIA should include the East Reading MRT scheme plus the TVP P&R, as the TVP P&R is an associated/allied scheme to the MRT and the environmental effects as a whole need to be assessed;
- Queried whether the EIA will consider the noise impacts of idling buses;
- EIA to consider potential for increase in car traffic at the Napier Road end;

- EIA to consider the loss/harm to woodland, trees, protected species, River Thames, and fragmentation of the green network;
- High potential for visual impacts in the setting of the listed bridge from the Thames to be affected; and
- A chapter on the socio economic effects of the proposals needs to be included.

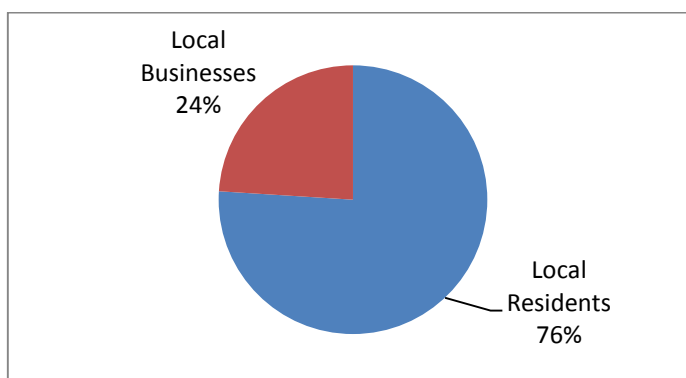
3.3 Public Exhibition Feedback

- 3.3.1 The public exhibition was held at the Waterside Centre, Thames Valley Park Drive, on Tuesday 19th July 2016, between 1pm and 7pm. The exhibition was attended by approximately 100 people, the vast majority of which provided comments by completing a feedback form at or following the event. In total, 124 feedback forms were completed during and following the exhibition, comprising 57 feedback forms placed in the ballot box and 67 online feedback forms. A summary of the responses received is provided below.

1. Respondent Information

- 3.3.2 97 of the respondents identified themselves as local residents (76%) whilst 27 respondents identified themselves as local businesses (24%) (Figure 3-1).

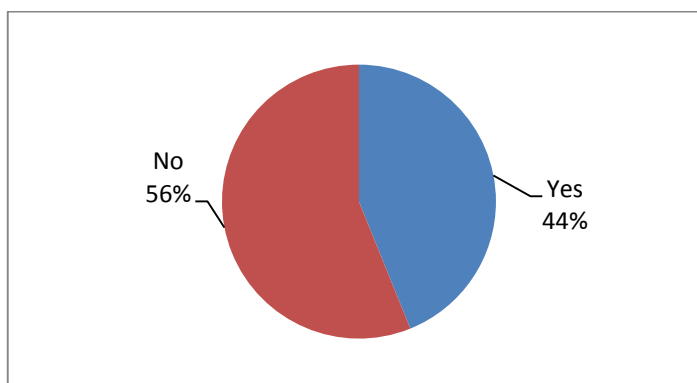
Figure 3-1 Category of Respondents



2. Would you use the proposed scheme?

- 3.3.3 Of those respondents who completed feedback forms, 53 (45%) respondents stated that they would not use the proposals, whilst 69 (55%) stated that they would use the proposals.

Figure 3-2 Responses to 'Would you use the proposed scheme?'



- 3.3.4 Of those who stated 'Yes' to using the proposed scheme, Figure 3.3 and 3.4 below indicate how these respondents considered that they would use the proposed scheme. Respondents indicated that they would most frequently use the proposed route for travel by bus, followed by walking. Respondents considered they would most frequently use the proposed route for travel to work.

Figure 3-3 Responses to Mode of Use

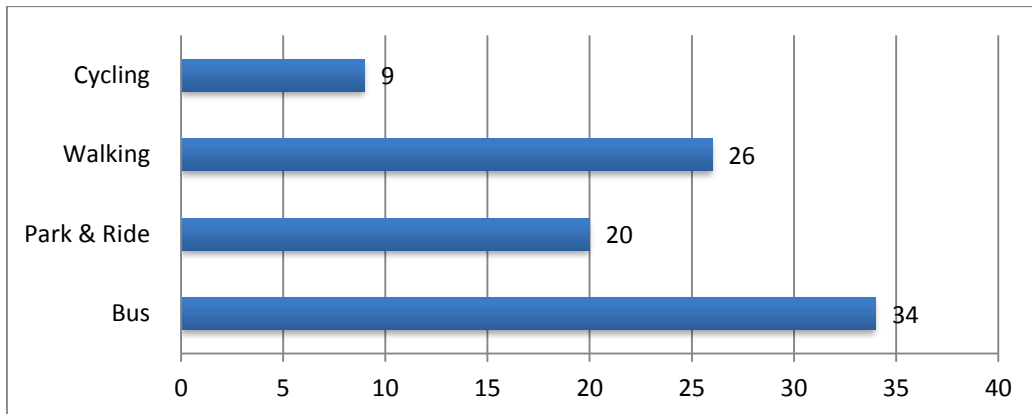
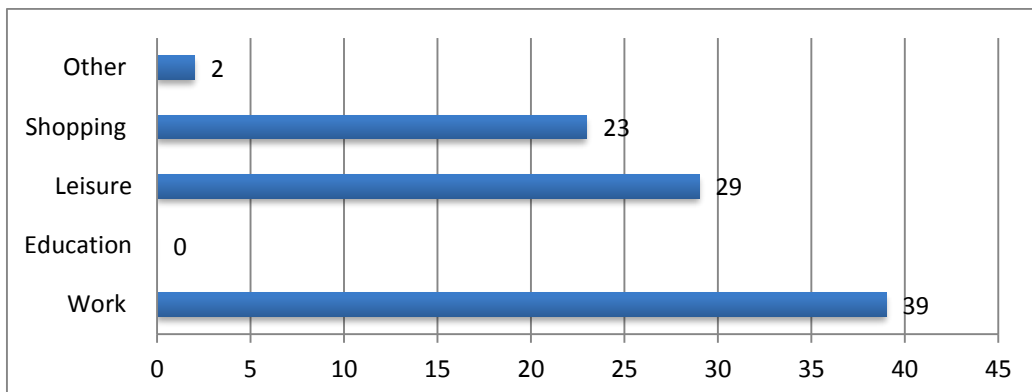


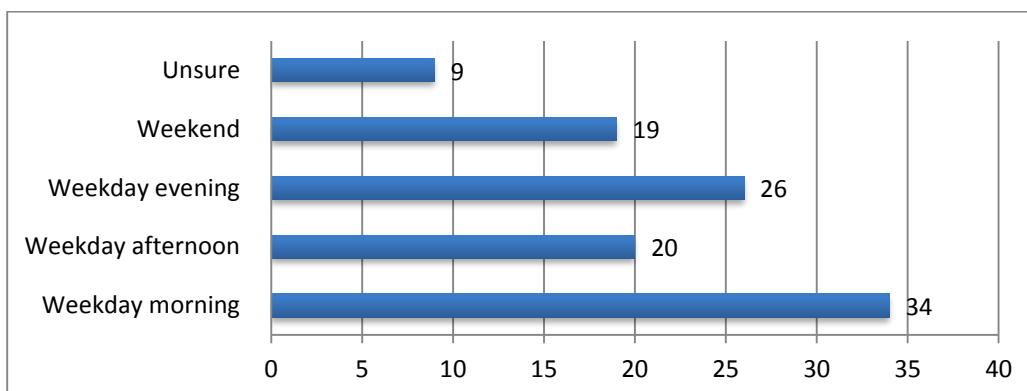
Figure 3-4 Responses to Purpose of Use



3. During which time do you envisage using the MRT, walking and cycling route?

- 3.3.5 Respondents considered they would most frequently use the proposed route during weekday mornings and weekday evenings.

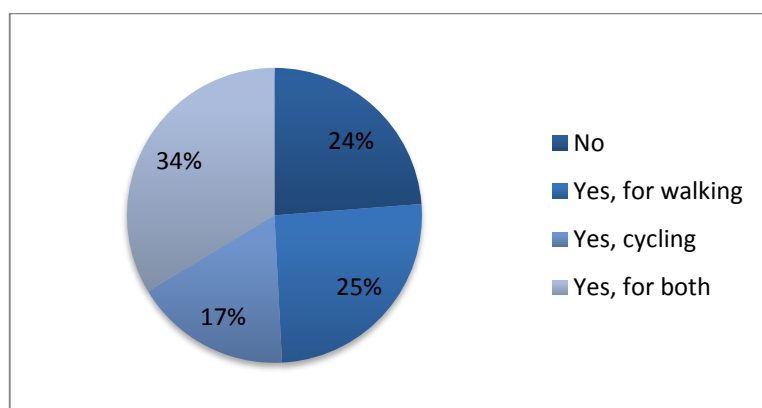
Figure 3-5 Responses to 'During which time do you envisage using the MRT, walking and cycling route?'



4. Do you currently use the existing towpath?

- 3.3.6 When asked whether they currently use the existing towpath, 76% of respondents answered 'Yes', either for walking, cycling or for both. 24% of respondents answered 'No' to the using the existing towpath. The most frequent response was answered by those who selected 'Yes' for both walking and cycling.

Figure 3-6 Responses to 'Do you currently use the existing towpath?'



5. Do you have any opinions on how the MRT route and bridge could be designed to blend into its environment?

- 3.3.7 29 respondents answered the question as to opinions on how the bridge could blend into its environment. The most popular responses related to:

- Trees and landscaping (9 responses);
- Design (8 responses); and
- Materials (7 responses).

6. Do you have any opinions on how landscaping could be used to soften the appearance of the MRT route?

- 3.3.8 43 respondents provided comments on how landscaping could be used to soften the appearance of the East Reading MRT. The most popular responses related to:

- Planting (30 responses);
- Design (6 responses); and
- Biodiversity (1 response).

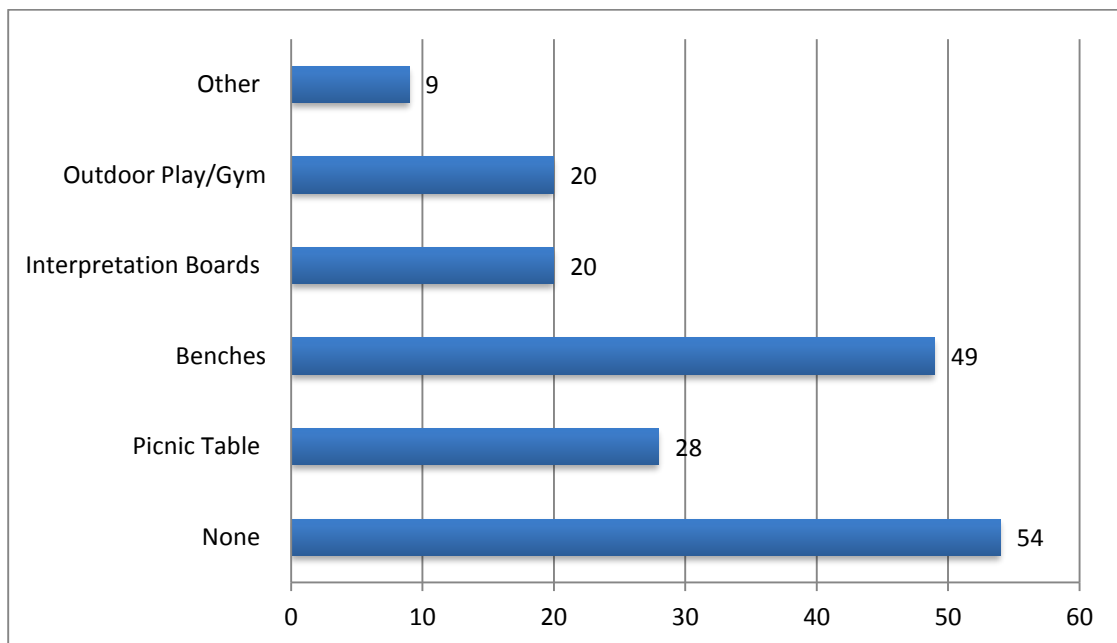
- 3.3.9 5 respondents commented that landscaping could not be used to soften the appearance of the East Reading MRT.

7. Should the MRT scheme include any recreation and leisure facilities along the route?

- 3.3.10 When asked whether recreation and leisure facilities should be used along the route, the majority of respondents said no (43%). The most supported type of facilities was benches (49 responses), followed by picnic tables (28 responses).

- 3.3.11 Seven respondents provided 'Other' suggestions for recreation and leisure facilities, including: garbage bins, viewing platform, café, periodic pedestrian access between the East Reading MRT and towpath, safe cycle parking spaces, and a miniature railway.

Figure 3-7 Responses to 'Should the MRT scheme include any recreation and leisure facilities along the route?'



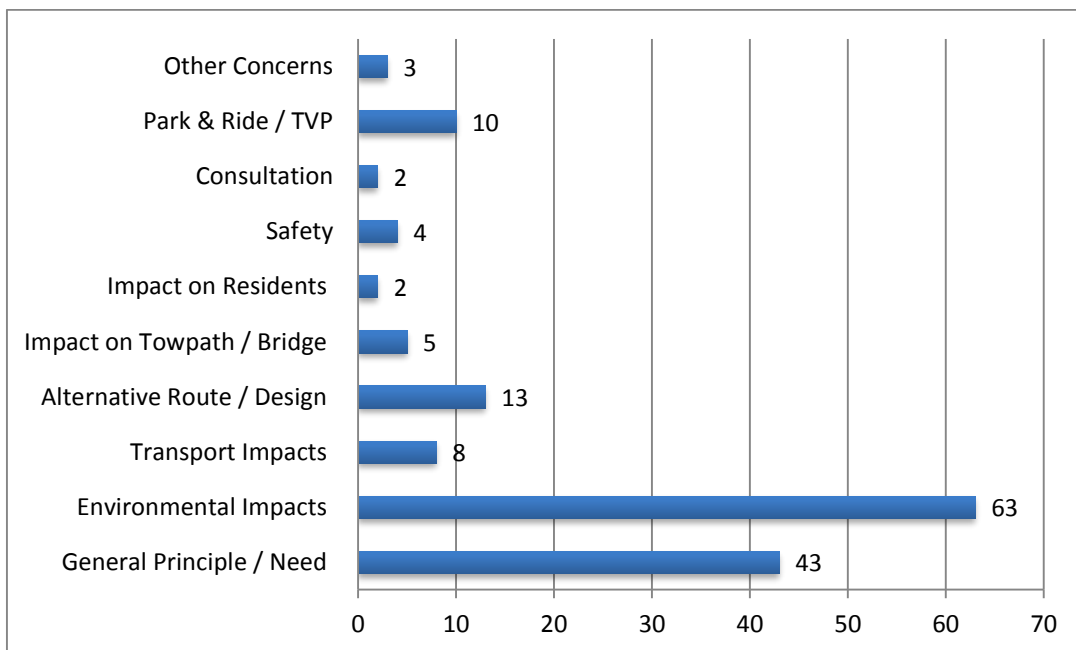
8. Do you have any general comments on the proposals?

- 3.3.12 A number of additional general comments were provided, which have been categorised as 'concerns' and 'suggestions'.

Concerns

- 3.3.13 The 'concerns' of respondents that were most frequently highlighted related to the general principle of development, potential environmental impacts and the proposed route and design.

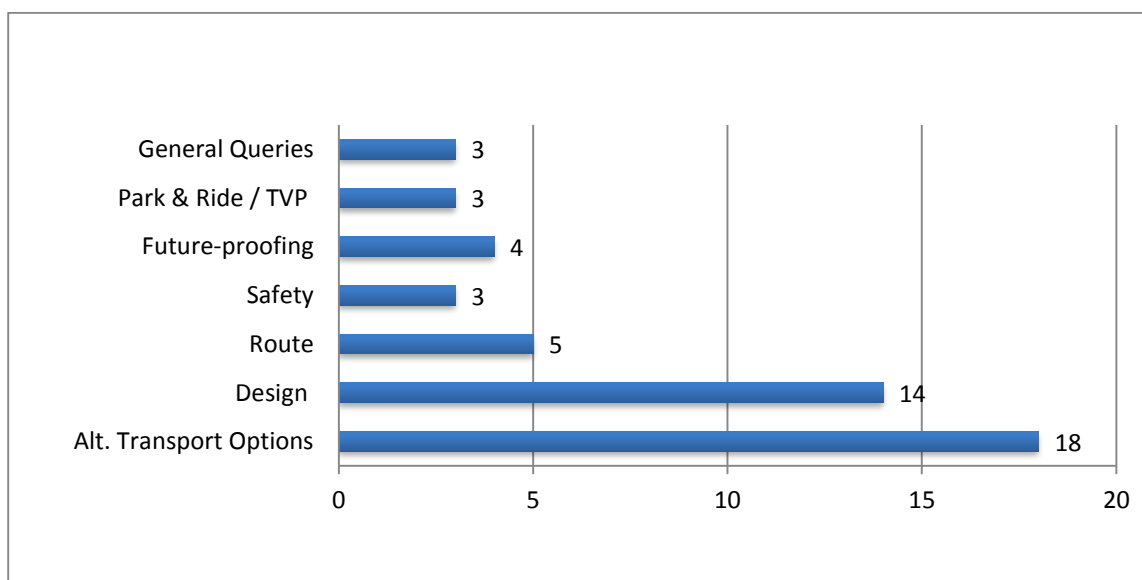
Figure 3-8 Respondents Concerns



Suggestions

- 3.3.14 The 'suggestions' of respondents that were most frequently highlighted related to consideration of alternative transport options and design options.

Figure 3-9 Respondents Suggestions



- 3.3.15 At the exhibition, attendees raised concerns with regard to the loss of space they enjoyed when leaving New Town.

3.4 Design South-East Feedback

3.4.1 The proposed development was presented to Design South-East for an independent design review on 6th June 2017. A formal response from DSE was provided on 16th June 2017 (Appendix I) with the following comments:

3.4.2 Principle of Development

- The strategic principle of the East MRT scheme can't be argued and the scheme should be delivered.

3.4.3 Use of Route

- The proposals should take the opportunity to incorporate leisure and tourism improvements, not just providing commuting benefits.
- The development should be promoted as a 'place' in itself, not just a through route.
- Will the route be used by the existing fleet of standard buses, or will the route be promoted for use by other buses, rail-link buses, other low carbon alternatives etc?
- How frequent will buses run and how will future demand be managed?
- Would pedestrians realistically walk along the route instead of the towpath? Pedestrians and cyclists may rather be closer to the river. Could the pedestrian and cycle routes on the East MRT be linked with the towpath, near to the pinchpoint section?
- Could cyclists also use the bus lane together with buses?

3.4.4 Design Concept

- The current proposed structure has a utilitarian design and is not considered to be elegant. It is thereby a magnet for anti-social behaviour. A utilitarian design approach would be acceptable however the appearance of the structure needs to be more attractive and elegant. If the appearance can be improved there would be less of a need to provide landscaped screening.
- The design approach should be more architectural-led rather than engineering-led.
- A design exercise should be undertaken to fully explain the rationale for the proposed option, and reasons for discounting other potential options.
- All potential design options should be explored first to establish the links/separation between the bridge and viaduct. Need for full design details of bridge form options, opportunities/constraints, rationale, reasons for discounting etc.
- Design concept should incorporate 'people-focused' design principles, not just based on a through-route.

3.4.5 Bridge

- Is there a way to get round the listed bridge constraints – opportunities to demolish/relocate etc?
- Consider impact on the listed railway bridge, not just the horseshoe bridge.

- Underside of the bridge and its abutments need to be fully considered in the design – consider other examples such as bridges at the Olympic Park over the River Lea.
- Proposed 6.77m height doesn't resolve the issue it's trying to achieve – the alternative 4.7m height should be reviewed further. The proposed bridge may appear more subordinate to the listed bridges if it's lower.
- The river mouth is a gateway to the town and should be celebrated – don't want to miss opportunities to link the town to the river.
- 'Fairly standard' bridge engineering is the problem at the moment – some other options should be reconsidered which have more sinuous quality.

3.4.6 Area beneath viaduct

- Embankment and open viaduct are the wrong way round given the site and landscape context. Open areas underneath the viaduct could make sheltering/anti-social behaviour more attractive.
- Could the land beneath the viaduct either be activated or closed-off, rather than being left open? Unfortunate to see the boat storage not incorporated. Temporary uses could be considered.

3.4.7 Surrounding links

- Design needs to acknowledge the links/interfaces with Tesco and the Park & Ride (e.g. qualitative linkages, bus stop locations etc).
- Consider interface between cycles/pedestrians on East MRT route and adjacent network to east/west.
- Scheme edges require further consideration (e.g. fencing, landscaping strips adjacent to Tesco).
- Note the opportunities to enhance links with the Dreadnought building.

3.4.8 Materials

- Suggestion to consider using a blade of corten steel along the structure, rather than concrete.
- Are the proposed materials the most sustainable that could be used (e.g. cement type)? Could the approach to sustainable materials be more ambitious, given the ambitions of the overall scheme?

3.4.9 Landscape / Ecology

- The landscape strategy should be based on an assertive proactive approach and not just responding to what can be squashed in.
- Ecological enhancements should be maximised along the south of the site (close to the railway embankment).
- Ecological restoration will be very important given the likely construction impacts.

3.4.10 Environmental impacts

- Buses stopping/starting in the one-way section over the bridge may cause additional air quality and noise impacts.

3.4.11 Consultation

- Further engagement should be undertaken with key stakeholder groups and statutory consultees.
- Is there scope to engage further with Network Rail to acquire a small strip of additional land if required?

4 Consultation Outcomes

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The consultation feedback received during pre-application discussions has informed the final submitted development proposals at the application site. This section explains how the Applicant and project team have considered the pre-application feedback and how this has influenced the final proposals.

4.2 Principle of Development

- 4.2.1 The principle of the proposed East Reading MRT scheme has been acknowledged and accepted throughout pre-application discussions.

4.3 Design

- 4.3.1 The utilitarian bridge design concept has been amended through detailed design work in order to enhance its elegance. The proposed amendments incorporate steel design, a more sinuous bridge form, amended abutment connections, fewer columns, cantilevered edge, and redesigned/coloured parapets.
- 4.3.2 The proposed height of the bridge has been reviewed, however a lower bridge height is not considered to be more favourable due to the need to allow views of the listed bridge arches, reduce visual impacts at eye-level and provide more attractive open space beneath.
- 4.3.3 The design of the bridge has been reviewed to consider whether a more 'landmark' feature could be proposed. However, a 'landmark' feature is not considered appropriate in this location given the heritage assets and pre-application advice.
- 4.3.4 More formal leisure uses have been considered and discussed with RBC and WBC, particularly beneath the viaduct, however these proposed uses were not subsequently progressed further due to concerns regarding urbanisation and maintenance.
- 4.3.5 Proposals also designed for pedestrians and cyclists (who may not be commuters), not specifically commuters travelling by bus (rationale for retaining pedestrian route).
- 4.3.6 Additional links between the East Reading MRT scheme and the towpath have been considered but are not deemed to be feasible due to the necessary length of graded footpath, the additional visual impacts and flood compensation requirements.
- 4.3.7 A high-quality landscape strategy is proposed to improve appearance and attractiveness of area to visitors, including provision of seating for example to encourage greater use and enjoyment of the area.

4.4 Environmental Assessment

- 4.4.1 A full EIA has been undertaken to inform the proposed development; the findings of which are provided in the submitted ES. The EIA has been undertaken in accordance with the EIA Scoping Opinion as explained within the ES.

4.5 Summary

- 4.5.1 The key outputs from consultation feedback which have informed the final development proposals are summarised below:

- Lightweight, slender and elegant bridge form which respects the setting of the listed bridge and the landscape context;
- 6.77m bridge height to replicate the listed bridge, minimise visual and heritage impacts, and provide legibility of design;
- Elevated viaduct to minimise impacts on towpath and noise and air pollution;
- Retaining openness of area beneath the viaduct to limit 'urbanisation' and visual impacts and retain the open and undisturbed public realm setting;
- Narrowing of route at key sections to minimise visual and environmental impacts;
- Detailed design treatment to minimise sheltering and anti-social behaviour beneath the viaduct, including raised viaduct height, rounded columns, anti-graffiti material and planting;
- Links between East Reading MRT route and surrounding uses including Tesco on western approach;
- Use of sustainable materials where feasible and appropriate;
- Detailed landscape and lighting strategy respecting the surrounding context and addressing potential amenity impacts visual and environmental context;
- Use of coloured materials to respond to the surrounding context; and
- Potential impacts on natural environment and landscape require full consideration.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1.1 The Statement of Community Involvement for both RBC and WBC encourages developers to undertake early engagement with the local community prior to formally submitting planning applications. Accordingly, the Applicant has undertaken a period of detailed pre-application consultation in respect of the proposed East Reading MRT scheme, in advance of the submission of a full planning application.
- 5.1.2 The consultation process undertaken has incorporated a number of meetings and discussions with key consultees, including RBC and WBC planning and technical officers, statutory consultees, Design South-East and local residents. Feedback received during consultation activities has been considered on an ongoing basis by the Applicant and the project team and has thereby informed the final submitted development proposals.
- 5.1.3 Pre-application consultation has resulted in the preparation of a high-quality scheme, designed with full consideration of the surrounding site context, taking into account key constraints and maximising available opportunities within the scope of the project. The detailed design and layout of the scheme has been informed by comments from key consultees and the findings of detailed technical assessment work, full environmental and technical assessments (as deemed necessary through consultation and EIA Scoping) to consider the potential impacts of the proposed development and the appropriate mitigation.
- 5.1.4 The Applicant is committed to continued engagement with consultees during and post-determination of the planning application in order to address the relevant issues.