

Introduction

1. South Hinksey is a small community lying at the centre of this huge and important scheme. The Village Ward of the parish borders the western floodplain and houses flood during high water events. The Environment Agency (EA) has in recent events provided temporary barriers and pumps to protect properties which has proved successful but not ideal. The threat remains ever present, worsening and stressful for residents. It is clear to this Parish Council that improved flood defences along the western corridor bordering the City are necessary and the large investment made by the government and authorities is welcome.
2. The Council would like to place on record our thanks to all those who have been involved in highlighting flooding along the western flood plain and to those authorities and organisations who have provided funding so that meaningful proposals can be considered
3. The Parish Council responds to this application based on the effects the chosen scheme will have within the Parish and the issues it raises during delivery and moving forward.

Part 1

General

4. The village of South Hinksey will be at the heart of the delivery programme for the first phase of the development. This is estimated to start in March 2024 and end in 2027. Allowing for some reasonable assumptions about run over this is a period of about four years. The language of the application when talking about the effects of the delivery model on our community is that issues of various sorts are temporary. The Parish Council does not agree with this language because it serves to underplay the real and tangible issues for our community over a long period of time. They are better described as semi-permanent. We hope that decision makers will see proposals in this light when considering this scheme.

The application

5. The Parish Council supports the need for a flood alleviation scheme and should this be, after full consideration, the only effective scheme (see para 6-12 on Hinksey Meadows) the Parish Council supports this scheme. Our primary concern is the delivery of a scheme. The application provides for the village of South Hinksey to be protected by a continuous flood bund/wall which protects all houses from rising water in the floodplain. This is welcome and supported and it is difficult for the Parish Council to envisage any successful scheme that didn't include this element. We do however have a number of issues that we feel need to be resolved before the planning application is considered or agreed. We list these below outlining the issue, the outcome it gives for us and what we ask the Planning Authority to consider.

Hinksey Meadows and Fields

6. These fields and meadows lie in the floodplain between North and South Hinksey and are an important natural amenity for parishioners and visitors from other parts of the City. With the exception of varied grazing, they have remained unchanged for 100s of years.

7. The proposal is that these meadows will be excavated along a 3km route to in part straighten Hinksey Stream and mostly to dig a large secondary channel on either side of this stream. This is the most controversial part of the application for some parishioners of South Hinksey and other communities along the route. It not only significantly disrupts and changes an old and beautiful amenity important to this Parish Council but the exercise of this extraction is the catalyst for all of the most difficult and long-term disruptive elements of this scheme that will affect for a significant period the reasonable expectations residents have for the quiet enjoyments of their homes, gardens and immediate environment.
8. The excavation of the channels will disrupt and, in some cases, destroy the important flora within these meadows and remove some 2,000 trees and hedges, gates and styles. The EA has plans to replace biodiversity in the area by replanting saplings, providing richer grasslands in the secondary channel and establishing ponds along the route, all of which are welcome. The big and important losses to the area are the mature trees and associated mature woodland and the likely long-term loss of a substantial section of rare MG4 grassland. In addition, there seems to be little guarantee that the delicate ecology of a large area of this sort will not be damaged in ways that cannot yet be identified or envisaged. The application identifies a net biodiversity loss in this area largely down to the substantial loss of mature woodland. The replacement of biodiversity off site is little compensation for these meadows and fields.
9. The Parish Council has considered if this is a “price worth paying”. In doing this we have heard and read the alternatives schemes considered by the EA and lobbied for by other organisations and also the importance of this channel in providing protection to homes in the Parish.
10. Much of the data on alternative schemes is in technical form and as discussion documents for non-technical communities to consider is difficult. The alternatives lobbied for by others are equally technical and argue about methodology, modelling and results. The only conclusion the Parish Council can reasonably come to is that doubt exists about the necessity to dig the second channel.
11. The scheme put forward would reduce the water in the floodplain by 21cms on the events most frequently seen in the last 30 years. For South Hinksey that would mean that without bunds/flood walls water would still come into Manor Road potentially flooding or threatening to flood houses. Of course, the prediction going forward is for much higher flows than seen in the last 30 years even with additional work up and downstream. It is clear to the Parish Council that the elements of the scheme that protects homes in South Hinksey are the bunds/flood walls. The secondary channel provides little benefit for this community but certainly produces much disruption.
12. **The Parish Council asks the Planning Authority to do all it can to protect the meadows and fields in the Western floodplain as an important part of the heritage of the area, an important resource for the storage of carbon and a large and varied natural resource for communities. In particular and importantly to be sure beyond doubt, through independent assessment, that there is no other option than to dig up these meadows.**

Part 2

13. Should the Planning Authority continue forward with the application as presented without the call for further assessment of alternatives then the Parish Council wishes to raise the following issues for consideration

Movement of spoil

14. The scheme proposes to dig a secondary channel through the western floodplain running between North and South Hinksey, which will produce huge amounts of spoil most of which will have to be taken off site.
15. This is planned to happen going north and south onto the A34 from the small island and short slip roads at South Hinksey. The application outlines the requirement to remove 900m³ per day over 440 working days. This equates to 114 lorry movements per day or a lorry every three minutes. This does not include the deliveries of material and equipment and the arrival and departure of staff and buses transporting other operatives to and from the site.
16. This is a huge civil engineering project requiring the movement of spoil not only onto the A34 but also around the site (haul route), this raises significant safety issues for any nearby communities and how these are addressed is not clear to the Parish Council.
17. It is further proposed that traffic is slowed on this section of the A34 to 40 miles per hour to allow for improved safety for road users. The A34 as it passes South Hinksey acts as both a national trunk route and also serves as the western section of the Oxford Ring Road. Traffic passing South Hinksey that wishes to continue around the ring road is often cutting in from the outside lane so particular caution is needed when joining. In recent years National Highways closed the truck layby (an area as long as our slip roads) just north of the South Hinksey bridge and we were told they considered it too dangerous for lorries to re-join at this point.
18. The reality of this as a workable plan rather than a modelled or desk top exercise is difficult for the Parish Council to understand or accept. The design of the road island and slip roads in question is for the use of a small community. The slip roads are short and cars join from a standing start. This is difficult to do but made slightly easier because gaps in the continuous flow of traffic do appear as it speeds from 50 miles per hour at Botley/North Hinksey to 70 miles per hour on the approach to South Hinksey.
19. Large, heavily-laden lorries will also have to join from a standing start needing of course a much larger gap in traffic to allow for their slow acceleration. Given that there is planned to be a lorry every three minutes it is hard to understand how this will work, it is likely that on most occasions it will take a lorry more than three minutes to join the A34 safely under the proposed 40 mile per hour conditions.
20. The application does not mention the potential issues with the much busier north bound entry and exit and the potential here to cause waiting traffic. The north exit and entrance serves not only residents of the parish but a golf course, a garden centre, a vet, a landscaping and building supplies yard and storage facility (producing journeys every day from large delivery lorries) and a number of other small business. The junction has no waiting area and because

“free flow” of traffic over the bridge will be restricted by truck movement (no room for passing) there is a real likelihood of traffic backup either on this short section of road or possibly the A34.

21. For residents, these lorry movements from the compound in the village will produce noise, pollution and disruption but also will mean that local cars and business traffic are likely to always be behind a lorry on the slip road during the operating hours.
22. This road represents the only road access into and out of South Hinksey village. The likelihood of unacceptable delays over a long period of time is unreasonable and, in our view, unworkable. The opportunity for a small community like ours to be able to influence the likely traffic plan that will be conditioned as part of this application is vanishingly small; in fact, the parties to the Traffic Committee are set within the application and do not include any communities.
23. The Parish Council has strongly lobbied the EA from the publication of the first planning application to consider moving this spoil by rail. After an initial resistance, the EA has explored this option and it is mentioned in the application as an aspiration but not as part of this application. Mention is made of a separate planning application should it prove possible.
24. **The Parish Council believes that the proposal to move spoil by road as detailed is unworkable and raises safety concerns at the only entrance to the village. It will cause significant traffic issues around this section of the Oxford Ring Road. Our residents should not expect to have their access to the road network so seriously disrupted for an extended period of time. The Parish Council asks that the application is not approved until the expected application for movement by rail is submitted.**

Rights of way

25. A number of rights of way run within and around the village. Some are closed for the duration of the works, others are permanently closed and one is diverted. It is in relation to this diverted route locally known as the Devil's Backbone that the Parish Council raises issues with the proposals as stated in the planning application.
26. This route is the walking and cycling route for village residents to access all services. It allows walking/cycling access to doctors, shops, bus stops and many commercial and work spaces within and around the City. Importantly it provides the walking/cycling route to our closest primary school, St. Ebbe's.
27. The diversion of this route takes it off its straight west, east track and bends it south into the flood plain re-joining the track again beyond the work area. The Parish Council believed that its discussions with EA over the gestation of this plan had led to an agreement that the diversion of the path would be at least as accessible as the current path to the full range of users. This would mean providing a suitable hard and robust surface across a similar width and raising the path at its full diversion to the same height as the current path to avoid what would otherwise be a difficult journey through a damp and possibly muddy floodplain during the late autumn and winter months.

28. Whilst the diversion is shown in the planning application, its construction is not. The EA project team has told the Parish Council that it is committed to doing this but cannot say what the path will look like or be surfaced with.

29. In the interests of certainty for the community and the reasonable and essential need to maintain a busy and necessary commuter route we ask the Planning Authority to require the inclusion of a design for the diversion of the Devil's Backbone within the planning application to put the standard and design beyond doubt and furthermore to require the route to be open continuously.

Haul route and Compound

30. The main compound for the first phase of works is in two fields immediately north and butting up to homes and gardens in the village. It will be established five or six months before works start and will remain in situ for about four years.

31. A haul route is established along the length of the scheme and into the compound, effectively around South Hinksey. This will bring spoil to the compound to be dried and then transferred onto lorries to move off site as already outlined. This route will be used by heavy noisy machinery in areas adjacent to where people live and walk.

32. The compound includes everything this project will need from offices, toilets and canteens to vehicles, machinery, generators, fuel and waste disposal. Half of the compound will be for the storage and drying of spoil excavated from the site. The compound covers a large area and many of the activities in it will be noisy. The application outlines working hours to be 7am to 7pm Monday to Friday and 7am to 1pm on Saturday. During negotiations with the EA the Parish Council asked that a 100m or one field buffer zone, measured from the end of the closest garden, be provided around the village to protect residents and their homes from the noise and disruption caused by this compound. Considering this large 5km site this is in our view a reasonable and achievable request

33. The offer from the EA has been to provide a 15m distance from the bottom of the closest garden to the compound fence, an additional 45m of 3.5m high top soil storage and an additional 9m of 4m high screening bund. This gives a distance of about 70m within the parameters we asked for. It is not clear if the offer was to seed the top soil storage or screening bund, instead the EA said this would be considered. It therefore seemed likely it will remain as earth.

34. Residents reasonably remain unhappy about the placement of this compound and the planning application gives no certainty of even the layout offer made.

35. Instead, the planning application asks the planning authority to approve the use of the whole of these two fields as compound. It does give a view of the layout of the compound as offered to residents but says it is illustrative only and subject to confirmation.

36. The Parish Council asks the Planning Authority to require the EA to provide for screening and a 100m exclusion zone around the village to protect residents from the noise and disruption caused by these working areas over a long period of time.

Sewage flows

37. At times of high water the village of South Hinksey sees sewage flow into streets and sometimes houses and a non-return valve has been fitted by Thames Water to help with this problem. The EA doesn't mention sewage flows in their application but has told the Parish Council that it expects their scheme to improve sewage flooding at times of flood. The EA commits to sharing data with Thames Water.
38. The Parish Council is concerned that the necessary bunding around the village has the potential in times of flood to put undiluted sewage in our streets. We need detailed reassurance based on the information shared with Thames Water that the effects of this scheme in our area will improve sewage flows as stated and how any identified issues can be mitigated.
39. **The Parish Council asks the Planning Authority to consider within this planning application the effects of this scheme on sewer flooding and solutions to problems identified.**

Maintenance

40. This project works with the natural flood plain and relies therefore on good maintenance to provide the flows modelled and to monitor the biodiversity gains promised. The scheme's life is detailed as 100 years. This maintenance is funded for 10 years only as part of the project; we understand this is the requirement to satisfy funders. The Parish Council has asked the EA what its expectations are for funding of maintenance beyond this period. It outlines in response that beyond this, maintenance will come from the EA's organisational flood risk management budgets.
41. This is a concern for the Parish Council. Maintenance of the ditches and streams in our area has been poor over many years with much of this responsibility in the hands of various landowners and the EA. It is our view that this poor maintenance has affected water flows. The Parish Council is also keen to see the public ongoing monitoring of promised biodiversity gains that are expected over many years beyond the 10 years specified.
42. **The Parish Council asks the Planning Authority to require a funded maintenance strategy for at least 30 years so that the authority and residents can be confident that this or any scheme continues to deliver benefits over time and that biodiversity gains can be publicly demonstrated.**

Cllrs Patricia Jones and Janet Lester