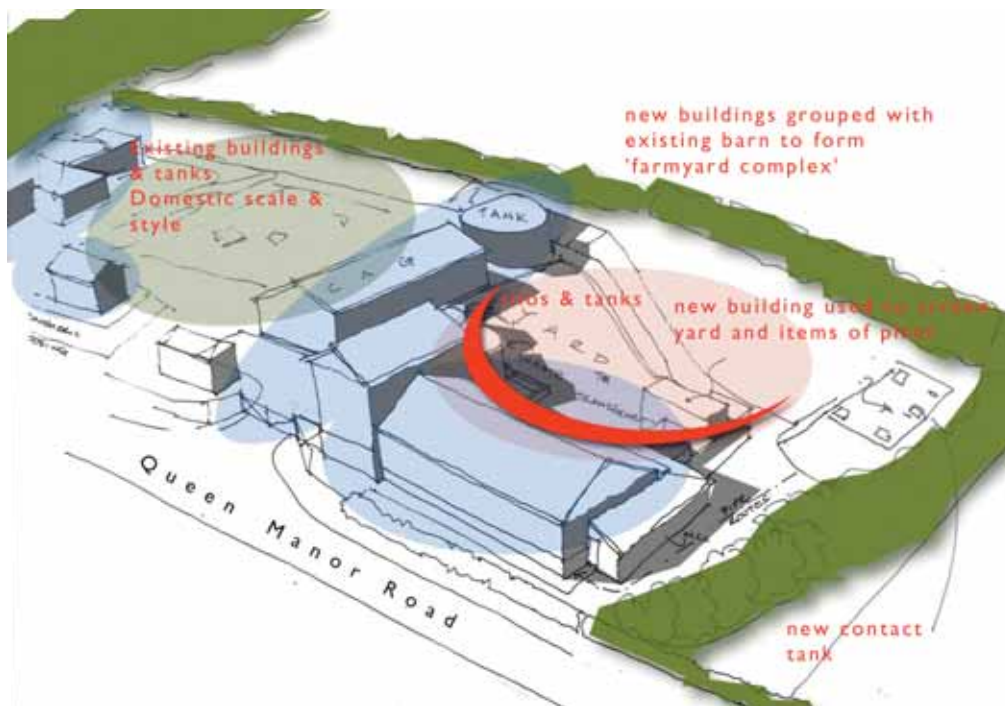


Nitrate & Pesticide Reduction Schemes

Wessex Water Services AMP 4 programme

by David Speddings, BA Hons, Dip Arch, RIBA

With seven proposed water treatment schemes for nitrate and pesticide removal to drinking water supplies required by 2007, all situated in locations with designations such as ANOB's, Green Belt, Scheduled Ancient Monument, and other sensitive environmental designations, the gaining of planning approvals was always going to be a huge risk to this AMP4 Programme by Wessex Water. Therefore, they took the decision to appoint an experienced design team in advance of the AMP4 Programme with the task of developing, in parallel with the engineering development, a comprehensive planning application package for each scheme, well in advance of programme deadlines.



The experienced design team was headed by Architects *Race Cottam* and within the team were Landscape Architects, Ecologists, Archaeologists, Acoustic Specialists and Highway experts.

Experience during Wessex Water's AMP3 Cryptosporidium programme showed that on average it took six months to achieve Planning Approval for a proposed scheme, but that some Planning Departments in local authorities determined applications within the statutory requirement of eight weeks but others, where the scheme proved controversial through its siting, or became politically sensitive, take up to 12 months.

Changes in Government guidelines, through its 'PPG' documents to Local Authorities and incentives based on performance for Planning Authorities to determine Planning Applications within the statutory time frame, have resulted in significant changes in the way that applications to Local Authorities are dealt with. Previously, when a planning application was submitted, there was often a period of time when additional information or specialist reports could be submitted to supplement the basic application prior to its determination. It is now increasingly common that if the applications are not accompanied by a full range of supporting submissions and assessments, then the scheme will just not be accepted by the Planning Authority.

The range of supporting submissions can only be judged on a

project by project basis but in the Planning Application Packs many local authorities will state that 'as essential' the following submissions have to be submitted and will be material considerations which the council have to assess as part of any planning application:

- * Access Statement;
- * Air Quality Assessment;
- * Ecological Impact Assessment;
- * Environmental Impact Assessment;
- * Flood Risk Assessment;
- * Town Centre Usage;
- * Listed Building Assessment;
- * Conservation Area Appraisal;
- * Noise Impact Study;
- * Transport Assessment;
- * Tree Survey.

Other recommended submissions include:

- * Archaeological Statement; * Consultation report;
- * Contaminated Land Risk Assessment; * Design Statement;
- * Economic and/or regeneration impact assessment;
- * Landscape details; * Photographs; * 3D models;
- * Planning obligations; * Travel plans; and
- * Sustainable Urban Drainage systems.



This level of information is comparable in certain circumstances to that required by Environmental Impact Assessments that are required by many sewerage schemes. The programming and cost implications of preparing for these submissions can be substantial and at a very early stage in the life of any scheme.

Approach adopted

The approach adopted by Wessex Water has been to involve its architect and landscape architect at concept stage, when even the process requirements and sometimes even the site is unknown.

With three sites around Salisbury, Clarendon WTW, Fovant WTW and Deans Farm WTW, all with 'Special Landscape Designations', with Deans Farm WTW overlooked by one of the most important Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the country, Old Sarum, three schemes in West Dorset, Winterbourne Abbas WTW, Friar Waddon WTW and Portesham WTW, all within the ANOB and with considerable Archaeological interest, comprehensive and robust submissions were required for each scheme.

A detailed justification for each scheme was prepared based on Wessex Water's agreement with the Drinking Water Inspectorate. Experience shows that even this can be questioned by Planning Authorities, who will employ their own water specialists to review the requirement. An engineering justification and explanation of the proposals sets the physical requirements for the scheme and justifies the requirement for buildings and plant. It is often at this stage that the selection of sites has to be considered. The question 'can it go somewhere else' is often raised by Planners and more often local representatives, so the justification for the chosen site has to be well documented. Depending on the sensitivity of the scheme this can be an informal statement highlighting local consideration, or as for the Winterbourne Abbas Nitrate Reduction Scheme, a detailed site selection study involving detailed studies into all the key issues, (in this instance, Archaeology, environmental and visual impact, ecology and highways), and culminated in meetings with key stakeholders, Planning Officer, Highways Officer, ANOB representative, County Archaeological

Advisor, English Nature and English Heritage, all who will have an influence on any planning application to select a preferred site.

It was only at this stage of the projects that detailed development and assessment was able to progress.

The design team reviewed National and local government planning policy affecting the sites. (Often planning policy permits justifiable developments by Statutory Undertakers to the exclusion of all other development). The ecological impact of the schemes, typically hedgerows, and impact on sensitive habitats, the technological, energy and sustainability issues of both engineering and building elements were all considered and reported.

The impact the proposal had on the landscape and visual settings of the area; this was demonstrated through the use of photomontages to show before and after development images, and other specialist reports, typically archaeological assessment and mitigation measures, and highways impact studies demonstrating how additional vehicle movements could be managed.

All these submissions were co-ordinated by *Race Cottam* and in addition to a comprehensive set of drawn information, formed the Planning Application.

To date, (May /05) Planning Approval has been granted for three schemes, all within the statutory 8 weeks determination period, a marked reduction on previous experience and three further schemes are in the process of being submitted. ■

Note on the author: *The author of this article, David Speddings, is an Associate with Race Cottam Associates, with extensive experience of working with the water industry. The practice has had a long association with Wessex Water, having been appointed architects on the AMP3 Cryptosporidium Projects and nationally with Yorkshire Water, Severn Trent, Dwr Cymru and Thames Water; also with specialist contractors such as Earth Tech Engineering Ltd., Hyder Consulting, Montgomery Watson, Mott MacDonald, Birse and CDGI.*