

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 17 July 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Fraser Massey (Chair), Sara Muldowney (Vice-Chair), Paul Arnold, Mark Hurrell, Kairen Raper and Neil Speight

Apologies: Councillor Sue Sammons

In attendance: Leigh Nicholson, Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection
Chris Stratford, Consultant
Elaine Sheridan, Electoral Services Manager

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

7. Minutes

The minutes of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 19 June 2023 were approved subject to the amendment provided by the Thames Crossing Action Group Representative.

The Resident Representative asked to be provided with the minutes.

8. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

9. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

10. Verbal update on Development Consent Order (DCO) Pre-Examination Process and next steps

The Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection informed the Task Force that the Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) had now been signed. Since the last meeting the examination timetable has been confirmed and the officer outlined the next deadline (18 July) and the submission of the council's Local Impact Report (LIR). The LIR will shortly appear on the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) website, along with all other relevant documents. Following this deadline, the focus will be on issue specific hearings and a series of written questions.

The Chair asked for some examples of the impacts and the officer outlined several examples including a) challenging the need for the project, b) the scheme objectives and what LTC is looking to achieve, c) safety impacts d)

value for money e) transport modelling issues, f) access to development sites and lack of consideration of alternatives. The environmental impact and flood risk impacts and emergency services provision were also outlined.

The Assistant Director detailed concerns about the legacy of the scheme in terms of skills, education and employment and concern about unambitious and insufficient localized targets plus commented on the key planning issue of the greenbelt. The applicant has not provided the council with a robust assessment.

The Consultant agreed with the points outlined by the Assistant Director and clarified that the council is not objecting in principle for the need for a crossing, it's the need for this crossing, as designed. The seven scheme objectives initially proposed have not been adequately satisfied. Other issues identified are land ownership, lack of compensation to residents who are seriously affected and control documents which must legally be complied with as part of the DCO application. The council has made suggestions for changes and improvements to those which are not properly covered.

The Task Force were reminded of future deadlines

- Deadline One – tomorrow (18 July 2023)
- Deadline Two – 3 August
- Deadline Three – 24 August

The Examining Authority will issue the first set of written questions on 15 August, with the deadline for response in one month. This is regardless of the number of questions to respond to. The process is due to finish on 20 December 2023.

The Chair asked Members of the Task Force if they would like to comment on the verbal update.

Members of the Task Force questioned if the council was confident it has the capacity to deal with these matters in a timely fashion and respond to the written questions. The Assistant Director informed members that there is a significant consultant team working alongside the authority and made reference to the PPA which provides the mechanism to make sure funding is recovered to cover the costs of the consultant team. Without those there would be cause for concern. The PPA covers the majority of the work and is different to the position of other local authorities largely due to the negotiations that took place. Certain items are not covered in the PPA such as responding to written questions, paying for Kings Counsel and attendance at hearings. These are covered by the business plan which has been approved and takes account of these items.

The Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) Representative publicly thanked the entire team for the work undertaken and members echoed this.

Members questioned if it was possible to tell if the examination was going in our favour. The Consultant responded that the first request for a delay was denied and the six-month program for the examination remained in place. The two issue specific hearings held so far have been different in that they have been less interrogatory and more an opportunity for parties to give their views. Overall, it is difficult to tell, and it is the nature of the independent process. Independence and confidentiality is maintained throughout.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative outlined that they had attended some meetings and the Inspector had asked some good questions and pushed National Highways to provide a certain level of information on aspects that had been asked for a number of years.

The Resident representative highlighted the site visits made as part of the examination and asked about feedback. Members of the Task Force were informed this is available on the Planning Inspectorate website under the examination library [LTC Examination Library](#)

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative also highlighted that residents are being listened to at site visits and the Inspector has planned visits to other sites as suggested.

Members of the Task Force discussed the issue of employment and the lack of guarantee for local jobs, in particular, what do National Highways class as 'local'. The Consultant responded that National Highways determine local to be people within 20 miles of the scheme and this has been questioned, along with the very few benefits which flow to Thurrock given that we have 70% of the route. The Local Impact Report therefore suggests that the definition of local is restricted to the three local authorities directly affected – Gravesham, Thurrock and Havering. Members further queried the possibility of setting a target that is not possible to fill and diminishing credibility bearing in mind the specialist workload and building

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative raised the issue of social media and propaganda regarding hydrogen and reduction of carbon emissions. Members discussed the issue about the PR operation by National Highways and suggested that Thurrock communication team and senior executives should be promoting our cause and issuing releases. It was suggested that the Communication team attend a future meeting of the Task Force.

The Chair raised the future work programme and highlighted the work of emergency services and the need for an item on the program in future. Members agreed and the Consultant summarised that this is covered by the Partners Steering Group on which the council is represented. The Steering Group will make their own submission and we have commented on this. Officers can provide a verbal update at a future meeting following discussion with the Chair if required.

The meeting finished at 6.51 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**