

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 16 October 2017 at 6.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Peter Smith (Chair), John Allen, Roy Jones, Steve Liddiard, Brian Little, Bukky Okunade, Terry Piccolo, Gerard Rice and Colin Churchman (Substitute)
- Matt Jackson, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Peter Ward, Thurrock Business Representative
- Apologies:** Councillor Tom Kelly
- In attendance:** Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Environment and Place
Ann Osola, Assistant Director Highways & Transportation
Ian Wake, Director of Public Health
Dr Kim Yates, Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues
Charlotte Raper, Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

10. Minutes

The minutes of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force meeting held on 25 September 2017 were approved as a correct record.

11. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

12. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Jones felt that all Members had an interest, in that they were representing their communities and the Lower Thames Crossing would have an enormous impact on all of Thurrock.

13. Election of Vice-Chair

As Councillor B. Rice had stepped down from the Task Force it was necessary to elect a new Vice-chair.

Councillor Liddiard nominated Councillor G. Rice, and this was seconded by Councillor Jones. There were no other nominations and therefore Councillor G. Rice was declared Vice-Chair.

14. Terms of Reference

The Chair asked whether any suggestions for amendments had been received by the Democratic Services Officer. It was confirmed the only request had been for clarification around substitutes, which was in progress with group leaders.

The Task Force agreed to continue with the existing Terms of Reference.

15. Highways England Update

The representatives from Highways England gave a presentation which outlined the process for surveys, including the varying types and explained why they were undertaken.

The Chair noted that residents had complained of noise in Gravesham and asked if the ground surveys were responsible. It was confirmed that ground surveys were currently underway and since the site was a fully active rifle range used by the Met Police it was only possible to carry out the works on weekends.

Councillor Jones stated that much of the land within the proposed route was farmland with good soil for crops. He queried what purpose the soil sampling served and what the outcome would be if the tests confirmed the land was ideal for farming; would the recommendation be to leave the land for its current purpose? Highways England would collect soil samples to form the baseline for their data which would be reported to the Secretary of State, who was responsible for assessing the scheme.

Councillor B. Little reiterated the point that the Council was against any further crossings within Thurrock. He added that the scheme should not simply rectify its own impact but improve the current situation in Thurrock.

The Vice-Chair understood the need for weekend works on the current site in Gravesham, but urged Highways England to reassure the people of Thurrock that works would be based on weekdays wherever possible, to limit the impact on residents' free time. The timetable for works was still in development; however the point was noted by Highways England.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative highlighted the poor air quality in Thurrock was well-documented. He sought clarification from Highways England as to how it would be possible to mitigate against air pollution on open air roads. Air Quality monitoring and traffic modelling would be undertaken to identify any expected impact, the areas covered would be wider than those monitored by the Council but the data would be comparable.

The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues asked whether noise monitoring would be spot checks or long-term data collection, and whether the Council could have input into the process. The details were still being discussed and the process would not commence until Spring 2018, but

Thurrock could express its views in the response to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Report. The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental also noted that ecology surveys were subject to time constraints and sought reassurance that it was all in hand. Ecology surveys required two years' worth of data and therefore they had been progressed earlier. All others had been well timetabled.

The Director of Public Health questioned the procedure if landholders refused consent for access for surveys. He also asked where the data results would be published and what type of result might impact upon the route choice. It was always the preferred procedure that consent was obtained from landowners; however under S53 of the Planning Act 2008 Highways England had certain powers if that consent was withheld. The results would be published as the Environmental Impact Assessment however could be shared with Thurrock Council in the interim. Ground conditions or particular species could impact upon the route; however there were no specific examples to illustrate the point.

The Vice-Chair asked for clarification around the scheme design, such as the possibility of 'cut and cover' or tunnels. He felt the proposal to have sections of the route elevated to 5-8m would hardly be conducive to minimise the impact on residents. He also noted ambiguity as to whether there would be four or six lanes and requested that Highways England confirm these details. The representatives present were responsible for surveys and the EIA Scoping Report therefore did not have the requested information but it would be fed back outside of the meeting.

The Thurrock Business Representative queried when the EIA Scoping Report would be issued and it was confirmed that Highways England would send to the Planning Inspectorate at the end of October.

Councillor Jones stressed that the proposed route cut through Green Belt and agricultural land, as well as habitat for wildlife and asked why this was the favoured route, as he felt it would cause devastation for Thurrock. Highways England had provided a series of documents outlining the decision process during the options phase but these could be circulated to Members outside of the meeting.

Councillor Allen asked both the Director of Public Health and the representatives from Highways England what impact they felt the Lower Thames Crossing would have on air quality and the health and wellbeing of those in close proximity to the route and the surrounding areas.

The Director of Public Health outlined that the health effects of poor air quality were well documented. About 50% of the air pollution in the borough stemmed from London and was simply in the atmosphere, so Thurrock suffered from 'background' air pollution. The Dartford Crossing and proximity to the M25 only made matters worse. There were serious issues with respiratory disease and a negative impact on cardio vascular diseases. Noise

and air pollution were also known to prevent people going outside and all in all the effects were largely negative.

The representatives from Highways England advised they were responsible for carrying out an assessment to understand the baseline data and demonstrate the expected impact which would be presented to the Planning Inspectorate and the Secretary of State. The Director of Public Health asked whether a full Health Impact Assessment would form part of the Environmental Assessment. Highways England stated that it would form there would be noise pollution, air quality and community assessments. The Director of Public Health felt this would be inadequate and urged the team to perform a full Health Impact Assessment.

Councillor Allen asked for clarity; as he understood matters, the traffic modelling and air quality assessments would be based upon predictions. Predictions would be made regarding traffic flow, taking into account local development plans for Local Authorities and Government Guidance for traffic modelling.

Councillor Piccolo questioned how robustly the traffic modelling was checked against real-time data, such as the effects of a 2-lane accident on the current crossing or the M25. The model was calibrated against real-time data though it could not be guaranteed that it would capture data such as Councillor Piccolo suggested.

Councillor B. Little requested that all questions which had not been answered be sent to Highways England in one document.

16. Environmental and Air Quality Issues

The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues and the Assistant Director of Highways & Transportation outlined the coverage of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Report and its role within the national infrastructure planning process.

The Director of Public Health felt the Council should stress the importance of a full health impact assessment, rather than having it fall within the Air Quality and Noise Pollution assessments. The Thurrock Business Representative did not believe Highways England would be able to avoid a full assessment given the enormity of the project. The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues advised that this should form part of the Council's response to the EIA Scoping Report.

Councillor Jones agreed with the points highlighted as of importance to Thurrock and felt the scheme description would also be paramount, to understand the proposed location of slip-roads and junctions to fully assess the impact. He then asked who would be responsible for the placement of diffusion tubes. Highways England would select the locations but Thurrock Council could review the choices and request additional data if necessary. Councillor Jones felt it should be the Local Authority who decided the location

of diffusion tubes. Councillor B. Little requested clarification upon the length of time data should be collected via diffusion tubes. He had been led to believe data should be trended for 2 years. The Independent Technical Advisor for Environmental Issues confirmed that the tubes collected data one month at a time, and for the data to be statistically relevant it should be collected for at least a year. Sometimes data was only collected over three months however discussions with Highways England suggested data would be collected for a year. Councillor B. Little stressed that, given seasonal variation and the effects of different weather conditions, the assessment could not be fully carried out in three months.

Councillor B. Little also queried whether major issues such as high winds, significant congestion and the effects of Christmas shopping at lakeside, or security closures at the dock could be included within the scoping report. Though not every day occurrences they were frequent enough to be of note.

The Vice-Chair agreed that the scheme description would be of great importance to the Local Authority. He wanted to see tunnels in highly populated areas, Thurrock saw the worst air quality figures outside of London and there should be careful consideration. While it was accepted that the Council was fully against the proposal for an additional crossing it would be necessary to ensure that, were the project to go ahead, it was in the most beneficial way to Thurrock possible and for that Members required full details. He was keen to understand how many intersections would form part of the route. The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues advised that those details should be covered within the scheme description.

The Chair asked how the project would fit with Government regulations regarding Climate Change. The Task Force was advised that the impact on climate change and the carbon emissions should be assessed as part of the process, in line with Government plans.

Councillor Allen expressed his view that the proposed route had been chosen by the Government and Highways England as it was cheapest, since there were no tunnels involved. He also felt that, alongside the Government's requirement for Thurrock to provide 32,000 new homes, this route was designed to unlock Green Belt land. He continued that there had been an alternative option which had proposed an 8km tunnel under the borough which would have caused no impact on Thurrock, with the emissions filtered. He felt that the proposed route showed no regard for the people of Thurrock. The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues assured the Task Force that air quality would need to be considered and all findings would be presented to the Secretary of State.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative noted that Thurrock Council had undertaken air quality surveys in the borough for the past 20 years and there had been an increase each year in the number of problem areas. A Freedom of Information request had shown that the Council spent £33,000 a year on one person to resolve issues regarding air quality. The existing 17 poor quality areas needed to be addressed, the baseline data

needed to be reduced to address existing issues. The Assistant Director of Highways and Transportation advised that there had been progress regarding issues with initiatives for improving air quality. The aim was to distance traffic, particularly HGVs, from residential properties where possible. It was necessary to find a way to allow for industry growth in the borough, without it being at the detriment of residents. The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative requested data from Highways England as to the expected difference in air quality impact between route 3 and the A14 route.

Councillor Okunade agreed that everyone was concerned about the health implications of the impact on air quality in the borough. She was unsure how 'distancing' HGVs from residential areas would have much effect, since particulates were in the air and would spread. Councillor Okunade queried whether the scoping report would target the worst affected areas and if topics were weighted in any way. She echoed the Vice-Chair's sentiments that, while she did not want the crossing to go ahead, it would be crucial to make a serious case for Thurrock if the proposal were approved. The Task Force heard that air quality had been focused on so far and other disciplines would be looked at. Any areas with significant impact would make it difficult for the Secretary of State to approve the scheme.

Councillor Allen asked if it would be possible for the 20 years of data on air quality, collected by the Council, to be presented to the Task Force as he did not believe, with more cars on the roads, how air quality could improve in the borough.

Councillor Piccolo enquired as to whether there was any way to confirm the accuracy of the data collected over the past 20 years, as it would need to be verified to prevent Highways England discounting data if they saw fit. The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues had been reviewing the data and so far was pleased that it had been intelligently used, and verified on a yearly basis. Any issues within the monitoring, such as tubes near traffic lights or road works, would be visible through monitoring data trends.

Councillor Allen sought clarity around how Highways England's findings would be verified. Both the Lower Thames Crossing team and Thurrock Council would collect data from three diffusion tubes next to a continuous monitor for comparison. Councillor B. Little asked for an explanation of the different monitoring systems, as he felt some Members of the Task Force might be unaware of the differences. It was confirmed that there were several types of monitors. Diffusion tubes were most commonly found on lampposts throughout the borough and collected data a month at a time. There were also continuous monitors that collected data around chemiluminescence and nitrogen dioxide levels. There were currently four continuous monitors in the borough, against which the diffusion tubes were normalised.

17. Key Milestones and Points of Influence

The Corporate Director of Environment and Place presented the Task Force with the Key Milestones and Points of Influence to clearly outline the route of progression.

The Chair asked for an explanation of the Community Consultation response scheduled for spring 2018. This would provide the Council with an opportunity to respond to the consultation works statement provided by Highways England, to outline whether the process was sound and voice any concerns. Councillor Piccolo sought further clarification as the response would precede the actual consultation. It was confirmed that it would be an opportunity to respond to works up to that point and the plans for the consultation process moving forward.

The Vice-Chair wished to ask Highways England whether the route would need to go by Chadwell-St-Mary if there were a roundabout at Tilbury, as this would serve the docks. He reiterated that the Council opposed the proposed crossing, but stressed that these questions would need to be asked if the proposal were approved.

The Assistant Director of Highways & Transportation advised Members that the Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping report would possibly be accompanied by a revised redline boundary.

18. Work Programme

The Chair opened the item by asking the Task Force to confirm their preference for start time moving forward. It was agreed that 6pm was ideal for all Members and Co-Optees.

The Task Force discussed the need for Highways England to be present at each meeting, and who the best representative would be. The Chair commented that there should be a range of specialities present to ensure all questions raised could be answered. Councillor Little reminded the Task Force that the final decisions would be down to Highways England and therefore they should be present at all meetings, with a regular, senior representative. Councillor Piccolo agreed it would be helpful for a senior representative to be present to provide consistency and ensure that if there were any questions which needed to be answered outside of the meeting it could be monitored by Highways England.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative felt that there should be an agreed response date for Highways England, as some questions had been raised at the previous meeting which remained unanswered. The Assistant Director of Highways & Transportation highlighted that some queries should be answered within the Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping report which was due to be received at the end of October, however there were some issues raised which would not be covered.

The Thames Crossing Action Group representative requested the Task Force be shown a virtual reality model of the proposed route; which had been

presented to other parties. He also requested full details regarding monies for remedial works on the current crossing to offer better scope on its usage. The Assistant Director of Highways & Transportation clarified that those funds would be the responsibility of a separate division of Highways England than the Lower Thames Crossing team however an update could still be obtained.

The Chair also suggested other outside bodies might be invited to the Committee, such as Campaign to Protect Rural England, Friends of the Earth and similar organisations. The Vice-Chair added that it might be beneficial to invite Buglife for their ecological views.

The meeting finished at 7.42 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**