

<b>16 October 2017</b>	<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Lower Thames Crossing Task Force</b>	
<b>Environmental and Air Quality Issues</b>	
<b>Report of:</b> Ann Osola, Assistant Director – Transportation & Highways	
<b>Accountable Directors:</b> Steve Cox, Corporate Director, Environment and Place	
<b>This report is Public.</b>	

## **Executive Summary**

At its September meeting, the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force heard from Highways England that the first formal opportunity that Thurrock Council would have to shape the evidence available to the Planning Inspectorate in their consideration of plans for a Lower Thames Crossing would be in its response to Highways England's Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report. It is expected that the Council will receive a copy of this document at the end of October, and then have 28 days to submit a formal response to the Planning Inspectorate. In order to prepare for this process, the Task Force is invited to (i) receive a presentation from Thurrock's Independent Technical Advisor explaining the coverage of an Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report and its role within the national infrastructure planning process; (ii) provide initial comments and specific matters to note under the various headings covered; (iii) receive an update on progress in relation to the Council's discussions with Highways England to jointly establish a process for independent air quality testing, and ensuring that the Council has access to all data used to reach decisions.

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 That the Committee receives a presentation from the Council's Independent Technical Advisor on the Environmental Impact Assessment process.**
- 1.2 That Task Force Members flag particular issues for officers to take on board in their preparations to respond to the expected Environmental Impact Scoping Report.**
- 1.3 That the Task Force provides comments on the proposed way forward to relation to establishing a process for independent air quality testing and access to air quality data used to reach decisions. (Details to be tabled at the meeting.)**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 At its September meeting, the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force heard from Highways England that the first formal opportunity that Thurrock Council would have to shape the evidence available to the Planning Inspectorate in their consideration of plans for a Lower Thames Crossing would be in their response to Highways England's Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report. The likely timescale for receipt of this document is the end of October. The Highways England project team will submit this document to the national Planning Inspectorate as part of the pre-application requirements of seeking a Development Consent Order for the scheme. The Planning Inspectorate will then send a copy of the Scoping Report to Thurrock Council and other statutory consultees, allowing them 28 days to make a formal response which will then be considered by the Planning Inspectorate in forming its Scoping Opinion. This Scoping Opinion, together with the initial Scoping Report, will define the extent of evidence collected on environmental issues, and the emphasis placed on pertinent issues during the Examination in Public.
- 2.2 The Environmental Scoping Report is likely to cover the following elements:
- Introduction
  - Scheme Description
  - Consideration of Alternatives
  - Environmental Assessment Methodology
  - Air Quality
  - Cultural Heritage
  - Landscape
  - Biodiversity
  - Geology and Soils
  - Materials
  - Noise and Vibration
  - People and Communities
  - Road Drainage and Water Environment
  - Climate Change
  - Human Health and Wellbeing
  - Combined and Cumulative Effects
  - Outline Environmental Management Plan
  - Conclusions
- 2.3 Air Quality has already been highlighted as a matter of significant concern for Thurrock residents. At its meeting of 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Thurrock Council resolved that Highways England be asked to engage with the Council to establish a process for independent air quality testing, and to allow Thurrock Council to have access to all data used to make decisions. Council officers have been in dialogue with Highways England representatives to progress this matter, and will provide an update on the latest position at the meeting.

## **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 The timescale for responding to the Environmental Impact Scoping Report, once it has been sent from the Planning Inspectorate is very tight, and failure to meet this deadline could result in Thurrock views not being adequately considered by the Planning Inspectorate in setting out its Opinion.
- 3.2 The Lower Thames Crossing Task Force will have a key role to play in the Council's response, and it is envisaged that, by the time of the next meeting of this group, the Council will have received the Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report from the Planning Inspectorate, and Task Force Members will be presented with an outline response at their November meeting. In preparation for this, the Task Force is asked to receive a presentation which will provide context for the required response, and set out the main topic areas to be covered.
- 3.3 At an operational level, Thurrock Council has progressed its preparation for responding to the Planning Inspectorate by engaging an Independent Expert to inform the Council's Scoping Report response, particularly in relation to Air Quality. It has also established a working group of relevant Council officers to develop a baseline picture of environmental issues in Thurrock, and start to identify those likely to be of particular concern and significance in relation to the Lower Thames Crossing. Task Force Members will be provided with a PowerPoint presentation of work to date and invited to identify specific areas for further work and focus.
- 3.4 Further to resolution by Council on 26 July 2017 that the Council engage with Highways England to establish a process for independent air quality testing, and that the Council have access to all data used to make decisions. Council officers are in dialogue with Lower Thames Crossing project officers, and a series of face-to-face meetings have been arranged for the days immediately preceding the Task Force meeting. A verbal update will be provided.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 The reason for the recommendations is to prepare for the issuing of an Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report response in line with Planning Inspectorate timescales.

#### **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

N/A

#### **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 6.1 A timely and comprehensive response to the Environmental Impact Scoping Report will support Council and community interests.

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**  
**Management Accountant**  
**(Environment and Place)**

The activities set out in this report will be funded from existing budget allocations.

## 7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Vivien Williams**  
**Planning and Regeneration Solicitor**

The activities set out in this report support the Council in discharging its obligations as statutory consultee under the 2008 Planning Act.

## 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Community Development Manager**

Diversity and Equality impacts will fall within the scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report, and will form part of the Council's formal response.

## 7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

There are no other implications.

## 8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- July 2017 Council Lower Thames Crossing Report

## 9. **Appendices to the report**

None

### **Report Author:**

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