

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 23 April 2018 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Peter Smith (Chair), Gerard Rice (Vice-Chair), John Allen, Roy Jones, Tom Kelly, Steve Liddiard and Bukky Okunade

Matt Jackson, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Westley Mercer, Thurrock Business Board
Linda Mulley, Resident Representative

Apologies: Councillor Brian Little and Peter Ward

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Steve Cox, Corporate Director Place
Ian Wake, Director of Public Health
John Lamb, Interim Assistant Director - Lower Thames Crossing
Helen Horrocks, Strategic Lead Commissioner for Public Health
Navtej Tung, Principal Transport Planner
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Tim Jones, Highways England
Ian Kennard, Highways England
Paul Manklelow, Highways England
Alison Powell, Highways England
Caroline Soubry-Smith, Highways England
Tom Wright, Highways England
Gary Hodge, Highways England

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.

The Chair reminded Members that as we were within the pre-election period, also known as Purdah, the meeting was an opportunity for Members to seek information and not to be used as a political platform.

62. Minutes

The minutes of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force meeting held on the 19 March 2018 were approved as a correct record.

63. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

64. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Jones declared that, as residents of Thurrock, every Member of the Task Force had an interest in the future of the proposed scheme.

65. Update on Liaison with Highways England

The Corporate Director of Place presented the item which provided the Task Force of an update regarding a meeting that had taken place between Council Officers and Highways England since the last meeting of the Task Force.

Councillor Okunade requested that points raised at the 22 January 2018 be forwarded to Task Force Members.

Councillor Kelly raised concerns of the proposed plans in relation to the issues in Dartford following the consultation pitched by Highways England on the 22 March 2015. Where it was stated that it would be Highways England's obligation to sort out Dartford issues as part of this project and that pressure should be continued to be applied.

The Chair stated that the plans were flawed and lacked vision and highlighted that offering no rail links was an oversight by Highways England.

Councillor Rice requested a business case detailing route comparisons that would demonstrate best value for money. Tim Jones stated that this would be necessary as part of the Business Case which was currently being developed.

Tim Jones agreed to make sure the whole business case brought in Dartford for when the scheme operates from 2027 and offered to hold a summit to look at how the two crossings worked. This would be undertaken through the summer period with the final Business Case including public consultation feedback.

Councillor Jones questioned Highways England on the complexity of constructions on the Kent (south side). Tim Jones stated that there would be complex constructions and some major civil engineering issues on the south side which Thurrock would not have. That it would be hard to differentiate the two sides and that both would be treated the same. Councillor Jones stated there was still a lot of uncertainty by Thurrock residents.

Councillor Jones requested an update on the plans for the railway section. Tim Jones stated that this would be a matter for the technical group and were on the action list. The action list was worked on week by week and that items had been accelerated.

Councillor Jones requested an update on the downgrading of the A1089. Tim Jones stated that it would be highly unlikely that the A1089 would be downgraded.

Councillor Allen stated he strongly continued to be opposed to the Lower Thames Crossing coming through the borough.

The Chair repeated concern following the surprise announcement by Highways England at the previous Task Force that Heath Road would be closed. He requested that Heath Road should not be closed as shown in the virtual impact video by Highways England.

Tim Jones stated that Highways England had now re-considered and could re-assure the group that Heath Road and Baker Street would now not be closed as part of the plans. Councillor Rice accepted this decision and stated that Highways England was heading in the right direction on decision making.

The Resident Representative stated that it was very difficult for members of the Task Force not get too personal when speaking on behalf of public residents as Highways England were proposing something at the heart of their community.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative stated that Highways England should be more open and present their information more accurately. Tim Jones stated that it was unusual for Highways England to release information until after the public consultation and confirmed that no further information would be released until this consultation had been published.

Councillor Kelly requested that the junction between the A1089 and the A13 be scrutinised as a separate item. The Chair agreed to add this to the work programme as this would be seen as vital for Thurrock road networks.

Councillor Allen asked Highways England how they can assure the best interests of residents when Highways England was unable to tackle the litter problem on the A1089 and A13. Tim Jones stated that lots of litter initiatives had been put in place and agreed that more needed to be done in cooperation with Thurrock Council and the Police. Councillor Allen stated that the current contract with Connect25 should be addressed. Tim Jones stated that Connect25 were under pressure from Thurrock Council and Highways England and agreed to respond directly to Councillor Allen.

Councillor Rice stated that the untidiness between Chadwell St Mary and Woodside needed to be addressed.

Councillor Jones queried as to whether an updated version of the virtual impact video would be provided by Highways England that would show the location of houses.

The Chair stated that the Task Force would be seeking to thoroughly review a future version of the fly through. Tim Jones stated that no further information would be provided until following the statutory consultation.

66. Highways England Action List

The Chair stated that Highways England had received the list of Member Priorities that were presented to the January Task Force with a considerable amount of those priorities reflecting ongoing work with some of them being captured in the Highways England Action List. That Highways England were reviewing the responses to the list of Task Force Priority and that Thurrock Officers would work with Highways England to ensure that concerns are reflected and addressed over coming weeks. Future Task Force meetings would receive updates, produced by Highways England on each of the key priorities.

67. Health Impacts

The Director of Public Health presented to Members the understanding of the potential health impact of the proposed Lower Thames Crossing.

The Chair thanked the Director of Public Health for the very detailed presentation.

The Resident Representative stated that it was vital that Highways England undertook sound proofing measures as it was evident that the exposure of continuous background noise would affect residents. The Resident Representative requested reassurances that this would start immediately.

Councillor Jones thanked the Director of Public Health for a good presentation and questioned Highways England how the noise and pollution could be omitted. Tim Jones stated that Highways England would look at the road structure first before these could be addressed.

The Director of Public Health stated that following an evaluation it was vital that for urban breathing, structures should be built as much as possible underground.

Councillor Rice stated that following advice from medical advisors it was evident that sound proofing would have some remedial affects to residents and questioned why a Health Impact Assessment was not being carried out. Councillor Rice also questioned why Highways England was not listening to the public and the health experts. Tim Jones stated that presentations would be made following discussions with the working group and the design team.

Councillor Allen stated that the borough's infrastructure should be addressed first especially the east facing slip roads on the A13 at Lakeside.

Councillor Kelly requested that more research was undertaken on the comparison of the potential huge influx of heavy goods vehicles over the next 10 years and what affect this would have on the expansion of roads in the borough. The Director of Public Health agreed that some detailed research was vital.

Tim Jones stated that there was a need to meet more frequently than every week to consider the detail of the scheme and help Highways England with the design. The Interim Assistant Director – Lower Thames Crossing stated that the offer of further technical meetings was noted however Thurrock Council was already investing a considerable amount of Officer time into understanding the project consistent with what the Task Force had requested.

The Interim Assistant Director – Lower Thames Crossing also stated that it fell to Highways England to design and develop their proposal. As Applicant it fell to Highways England to respond to local concerns during design and development and Officers will but it would not be for Thurrock Council Officers to co-design the scheme – for instance Members had requested that the majority of the scheme be in tunnel or cut and cover and this would form the basis of technical discussion but how Highways England actually responded was down to them as Applicant. The Corporate Director of Place and the Interim Assistant Director – Lower Thames Crossing will continue to attend the technical meetings alongside Highways England in that context.

68. Highways England Update - Health Impacts

Highways England presented their Health Impacts presentation to Members of the Task Force.

The Chair thanked Highways England for the presentation.

Councillor Rice stated that the presentation was very comprehensive but had not addressed why a Health Impact Assessment would not be carried out. Highways England stated that a Social Impact Assessment would be undertaken in a broader sense.

Councillor Rice stated that Highways England must pay attention to the four Public Health Directors and professionals and proceed with the Health Impact Assessment.

The Chair stated that a letter had recently been sent to Highways England and would give them the opportunity to respond. Tim Jones reported that he had not received that letter.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative stated that pollution would affect all residents especially with the forecast of an extra 250,000 vehicles travelling through the borough. Highways England stated that an air quality assessment had been undertaken that had explored the wider factors and impacts on the health of residents.

The Resident Representative stated that the Social Impact Assessment had no relevance and that the key factors raised by Thurrock Council and residents appeared to have been watered down by Highways England and had not offered a true impact.

The Director of Public Health reiterated that a Health Impact Assessment was vital and should be undertaken without fail.

The Chair stated that all Members agreed.

Councillor Jones questioned how air quality, pollution and noise could be alleviated when there would be substantial elevated sections in the scheme.

Councillor Okunade questioned how confident Highways England was where air quality mitigation proposals would reduce the risk to life.

Councillor Allen stated that Highways England should listen to the professional's judgement and undertake a Health Impact Assessment.

Tim Jones stated that in his view his team needed to be congratulated on the hard work involved on their presentations which were of such complex technical nature. He felt the scope of the project was very comprehensive and once the letter had been received by Highways England it would be analysed and would take the Director of Public Health's point and the test the Health and Social Impacts so that no confusion could be made between the two. Tim Jones would report back and clarify to Task Force Members.

The Chair questioned whether both a Social Impact Assessment and a Health Impact Assessment could be undertaken. Tim Jones stated that once Highways England had the opportunity to analyse the letter they would come back and comment.

Councillor Kelly questioned whether the equality report on deprived areas had identified a bigger risk to the population of those areas. Highways England stated that studies would be undertaken on vulnerable groups and baseline where and how these groups may be affected but he saw no reasons that a full Health Impact Assessment would provide any greater understanding than currently proposed. The Director of Public Health stated that he could not disagree more that it was evident that deprived areas would be affected more. Highways England stated that links with air quality schemes would also be undertaken.

69. Lower Thames Crossing Task Force Priorities

The Interim Assistant Director – Lower Thames Crossing stated that the Members would be familiar with the Priorities list. This had not changed and still featured the primary areas of concern as first stated three months ago. He advised Members that this should be used as a useful checklist to reflect on the items with Highways England providing feedback and updates in the future.

The Chair reiterated to Members that this item was most important and that responses to it by Highways England would be expected each month.

Councillor Rice requested Highways England dealt with house valuations in the borough to protect residents should the scheme go ahead.

The Thames Crossing Group Representative requested a deep dive session on Baker Street be added to the work programme.

Councillor Jones requested as part of the consultation an item be added on whether there would be any restriction on unescorted tankers. Tim Jones re-stated that as previously advised the new crossing would be 'Category A' and would indeed provide free flow. Tim Jones stated that freight vehicles would be encouraged to use the Lower Thames Crossing especially those travelling north. The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative stated that this would not be the most effective way for the deliveries made by oil tankers into the borough.

Councillor Kelly requested that answers from Highways England should be provided in writing.

The Corporate Director of Place stated that issues raised would generally form part of the statutory consultation and suggested that the next Task Force meeting focused on developing the Priorities List to ensure that it was understood what Thurrock needed and that the Priorities List could form part of the consultation process.

The Thurrock Business Board Member asked Highways England what calculations had been undertaken to establish the potential number of deaths in the construction and operation of the Lower Thames Crossing. Tim Jones stated that there was no excuse for any incidents of a serious nature on building schemes and this was taken very seriously with zero deaths reported on the 2012 London Olympic sites. Tim Jones stated that members of the Task Force had not mentioned the safety of road workers which Highways England also took very seriously.

70. Work Programme

Councillor Liddiard requested an item on the A13 East Slip Roads at Lakeside be added to the work programme.

Councillor Kelly requested an item on the junction between the A1089 and the A13 be scrutinised and added to the work programme.

The Thames Crossing Group Representative requested an item on a deep dive session on Baker Street be added to the work programme.

The meeting finished at 7.50 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**