

<b>26 July 2017</b>		<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Council</b>		
<b>Lower Thames Crossing</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Councillor Robert Gledhill, Leader of the Council		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Ann Osola, Assistant Director – Transportation and Highways		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Steve Cox, Corporate Director – Environment and Place		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## **Executive Summary**

This report updates Council on events following the Secretary of State's announcement on 12 April 2017 of a preferred route for a Lower Thames Crossing. It seeks agreement to the Council's position and an approach going forward to the point where an application is submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for development consent under the National Strategic Infrastructure Planning (NSIP) process.

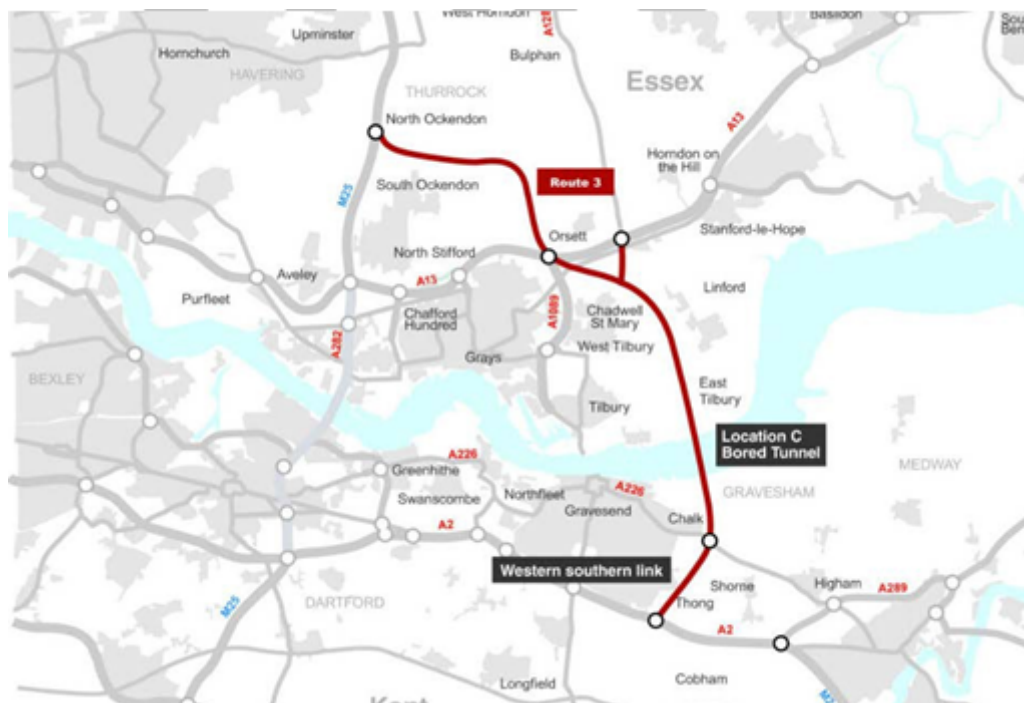
### **1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 That Thurrock Council maintains its opposition to any new river crossing and associated new road in Thurrock and that any engagement by the Council with Highways England does not constitute acceptance of the overall scheme.**
- 1.2 That the Council utilises Highways England's scheme development process in order to continue its opposition to the scheme, fulfil its statutory responsibilities as a planning and highway authority, as a consultee and as a landowner, and to protect the interests of residents in Thurrock.**
- 1.3 That the Council ask Highways England to jointly establish with the Council a process for independent air quality testing and to provide the Council with access to all data used to reach decisions.**
- 1.4 That the Council request financial support from Highways England or Government in order to meet its responsibilities and to represent the interests of Thurrock's residents.**

- 1.5 That Highways England be informed that the Council requires at least 1 weeks advanced notice and details of any information, events or correspondence relating to the Lower Thames Crossing in Thurrock.
- 1.6 That General Services Committee be invited to establish a cross party Lower Thames Crossing Task Force and to agree its Terms of Reference at the next General Services Committee meeting.
- 1.7 That the three Group Leaders write to the Secretary of State for Transport setting out the Council's position following full Council and that Highways England be invited to meet with the three Group Leaders as soon as possible.

**2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 Between 26 January and 24 March 2016, Highways England consulted on a number of route options for a Lower Thames Crossing. The unanimous view of all Members of Thurrock Council, as stated at the Council meeting of 23 March 2016, was that it opposed any further river crossings in Thurrock, and urged government to reconsider options further to the east. The view reaffirmed the position established by the Council on 28 November 2012 and subsequently confirmed on 25 November 2015 and again at full Council on 27 January 2016. However, in the council's formal consultation response to Lower Thames Crossing the council stated clearly that "should Government insist on progressing a LTC option after the consultation that Thurrock Council should have a seat around the table to help protect residents and businesses from the least-worst option"
- 2.2 The route option consultation on Lower Thames Crossing attracted over 47,000 responses which was the highest level of engagement on any highways scheme in the UK.
- 2.3 On the 12 April 2017, the Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, announced the preferred route for a Lower Thames Crossing. The planned route will run from the M25 near North Ockendon, cross the A13 at Orsett before crossing under the Thames east of Tilbury and Gravesend. A new link road will then take traffic to the A2 near Shorne, close to where the route becomes the M2.



- 2.4 Government also announced that £10 million will be used to improve traffic flow at and around the existing crossing as well as studying ways to further tackle congestion. This will include a wide-ranging investigation into options to cut 'rat-running' through Dartford and Thurrock.
- 2.5 Immediately following the announcement, the Highways England Complex Projects Team wrote to Thurrock Council as Local Planning Authority to provide formal notification of the Development Boundary (often called the 'red line boundary' – see Appendix 1) which is the envelope of land that needs to be safeguarded for the construction of the scheme. Thurrock is required to notify Highways England if it receives planning applications for development on land within this boundary.
- 2.6 Highways England also wrote to all owners of land and property within the red line boundary (including the Council as land owner), informing them of the implications of the decision, and of their rights relating to filing blight notices against Highways England. Land owners had previously been written to in relation to ecology surveys, with Highways England seeking permission for ecologists to have access to land to record information relating to migrating birds and other wildlife.
- 2.7 Thurrock Council has worked with stakeholder engagement specialists contracted to the Lower Thames Crossing Project Team to establish contact points and protocols, and to understand the next stages of the work. To date, community engagement specialists have met with Council officers to map local stakeholder groups and possible venues for public meetings. Officers have advised Highways England that no events should take place in Thurrock before this Council meeting.
- 2.8 Subject to decisions taken by Council, future engagement with Highways England will be necessary where the Council has a statutory responsibility for example as highways and planning authority, as a consultee and as a landowner. Matters to be addressed through this engagement will be those raised repeatedly by the Council on behalf of residents including air quality, the impact on local roads and wider environmental impacts. The Council will also need to consider the links between the proposed scheme and the widening of the A13 and the local plan. In order to have full confidence that Thurrock residents interests will be taken into account the Council has asked to be included in the commissioning of key studies, such as the environmental impact assessment, including any work relating to air quality.
- 2.9 Plans for a proposed future Lower Thames Crossing will be taken through the Development Consent Order (DCO) process for Nationally Strategic Infrastructure Projects (NSIP). This process sets out in detail the steps that scheme promoters need to go through to demonstrate that they have engaged effectively with relevant stakeholders, and considered the wider environmental and economic impacts of their proposals. Further information on this process can be found at <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/application-process/the-process/>
- 2.10 Highways England's timeline for taking forward the scheme is as follows:

**Summer / Autumn 2017**

- Sharing details of the DCO process
- Environmental Scoping Opinion – request for formal feedback from the Council as statutory consultee
- Consultation on environmental surveys and assessment
- Developing 'strategic vision and goals'

## **October 2017**

- Non-statutory public engagement on the emergent scheme

- 2.11 Work on transport modelling and route alignment and junction design will be undertaken throughout Autumn and Winter 2017 in order to develop a proposed design for the first round of statutory consultation in Spring 2018.
- 2.12 The feedback from this consultation will feed in to design finalisation and DCO Application preparation. Documentation will be finalised on Environmental Impact Assessment, Land Referencing and Planning Statements. The expected date for submission of a DCO Application is mid-2019.

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

- 3.1 Officers have been very clear in communicating the Council's position opposing a Lower Thames Crossing through Thurrock. It is proposed that the Council retains this clear position on behalf of residents. Highways England is continuing to progress technical work leading up to stakeholder engagement in the Autumn and statutory consultation in 2018. Given this is the case it is further proposed that the Council engage with Highways England in order to continue its opposition to the scheme, fulfil its statutory responsibilities and to protect the interests of Thurrock's residents. Council may wish to instruct officers to prepare a report which sets out the Council's initial position on these matters and those referred to in paragraph 2.8. This report would be considered by General Services Committee.
- 3.2 In preparing the Council for the challenges ahead, officers have spoken with other local authorities with experience of having major infrastructure projects delivered within their area. A notable example is the recent experience of Cambridgeshire County Council in relation to the A14 by-pass. Positive benefits arising from the delivery of this scheme include an improved working relationship with Highways England, as a vehicle for dealing with other operational matters; the establishment of a legacy fund for the benefit of local communities and significant skill development opportunities including the establishment of significant number of apprenticeships. It was also very apparent that the ability to influence the design to secure benefits and mitigate impacts, diminish over time as plans become more certain.

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

- 4.1 The benefits of a future Lower Thames Crossing will largely fall to those using the road and passing through the borough. The prospect of this road link being constructed will result in major disruption over a protracted period for many of Thurrock's residents, and bring more traffic into the borough with all its associated risks to the environment, air quality and the operation of the local road network. For these reasons, the council continues to urge Highways England to reconsider the possibility of constructing a crossing further east. Council is therefore asked to reaffirm its ongoing opposition to any road crossing of the Thames through Thurrock and urge Government to reconsider the current preferred route option.
- 4.2 This project has an unavoidable impact on Thurrock both in its planning and in its delivery. There is a need for the Council to engage with Highways England to fulfil its statutory responsibilities and to protect the interests of residents in Thurrock, particularly in relation to environmental matters. There will be considerable resource implications of ensuring that the Council is able to fulfill its statutory obligations in relation to the scheme and the borough's interests are adequately represented as this scheme is progressed. These are costs that are not a result of a Council policy or a project that has the Council's support. Council is therefore recommended to instruct officers to seek financial support from Highways England or Government to meet the costs to the Council associated with the

development of the scheme.

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

- 5.1 Discussions have taken place or are due to take place with each of the three political groups or group leaders. The recommendation to this report suggest mechanisms for continuing the cross Council involvement and maintaining cross party consensus.

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

- 6.1 Lower Thames Crossing will have a significant impact on the emergent Local Plan as well as associated policies and documents.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**  
**Director of Finance and IT**

The full financial implications of the Lower Thames Crossing being progressed are likely to be significant and cannot be fully quantified at this stage, however, it is appropriate that the council seeks to recover all revenue expenditure associated with data collection analysis and review of documents related to the scheme from Highways England as part of the legitimate costs of the scheme being taken forward.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**  
**Deputy Head of Legal/Monitoring Officer**

This scheme will be progressed for planning consent following the process for nationally significant infrastructure projects. Specialist legal resource will be required to ensure that the council's interests are adequately represented in the course of this process.

General Services Committee (GSC) can establish a sub-committee to look at a certain issue. Any recommendations made by that sub-committee would have to be considered and agreed by GSC as the parent committee before being discharged appropriately through the governance structure of the council. The membership and remit of the sub-committee would have to be agreed at GSC. A change to the Constitution would be required for the sub-committee itself to have powers.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Equalities and Diversity Manager**

Any future Lower Thames Crossing will potentially impact on many, if not all, of Thurrock's residents and communities, including those with protected characteristics. Significant further work will be required to ensure that these implications are fully understood and, as far as possible, full mitigated.

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

N/A

- 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):

Thurrock Council Paper 23 March 2016, Lower Thames Crossing – Council Consultation Response.

- 9. Appendices to the report**

Appendix 1 – Red Line Boundary Map

**Report Author:**

Ann Osola

Assistant Director – Transportation and Highways