

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 19 February 2018 at 6.00 pm

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

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

In attendance: Steve Cox, Corporate Director Place
John Lamb, Interim Assistant Director - Lower Thames Crossing
Charlotte Raper, Democratic Services Officer

Robert Audsley, Highways England
Chris Marsh, 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.

43. Minutes

The Thurrock Business Representative noted that, in discussions regarding the A1089 the minutes read "degradation of the rail network" rather than "road network".

The minutes of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 22 January 2018 were approved as a correct record, subject to this amendment.

44. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

45. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Jones declared that, as residents of Thurrock, all Members of the task force had an interest in the proposed crossing.

46. Update on liaison with Highways England

The Chair welcomed Westley Mercer, the newly appointed Thurrock Business Board Representative.

The Interim Assistant Director- Lower Thames Crossing presented a brief summary of contact with Highways England since the previous meeting of the Task Force. Meetings were held within the context that Thurrock Council was opposed to any new crossing however needed to liaise with Highways England to discuss technical issues. Highways England had also held a number of meetings with Ward Councillors and provided the Council with brief summaries of these meetings which had proven to be consistent with reports from those elected Members.

The Vice-Chair confirmed that a meeting with Gary Hodge from Highways England had taken place in Chadwell Library in which it had been suggested that part of the route would be placed in deep cuttings. He reminded Highways England that residents of Thurrock already bore the brunt of two tunnels, the QEII Bridge, the M25, A13 and the dock approach road and felt that they had made their contribution to the national road network so urged for sections near major conurbations to be tunnelled.

Councillor Jones agreed but added that at the previous meeting the Task Force had been advised there were Project Led Decisions that could not be influenced which had been unsettling to hear. Tonight's presentation was due to include a visual model to help Members identify key areas but as yet Members were still unclear as to what they would be consulted upon, which was very disappointing. The Vice-Chair added that a map had been presented, which he had assumed had been shared with all Members, and requested a digital copy be provided urgently.

Councillor Allen expressed his view that Highways England were showing disregard and disrespect for Thurrock. They had been asked to provide visuals to help members of the Task Force understand the impact of the scheme and had failed to do so, to their shame. The Highways England Representative confirmed that the intention had been to present a visualisation to explain the scheme within the context of the local landscape. The quality of the presentation had failed to meet their standards for public release and therefore they had been unable to share it. He offered apologies but explained that a presentation of inadequate quality could be confusing and even misleading. The Task Force was assured that the presentation would be ready for the next meeting, scheduled in March.

The Chair reminded all present that the Task Force had been offered assurances before which had fallen through; would the presentation definitely be ready for the meeting in March? Members heard that there had been a problem with one of the suppliers, involving difficulty converting information. Designers had advised they were two weeks from completion therefore it would be certainly be available for the next meeting of the Task Force.

Councillor Jones recalled discussions around this presentation in November. At that meeting Members had been advised that details were not ready and should be expected at a later date, however Highways England presented details at a meeting in Rainham the very next day. Councillor Jones expressed his disappointment at Highways England's engagement.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative noted a 17 point document had been raised by the Council two years ago which had still not been answered, the Task Force had presented a document at Christmas which had not been answered and now Highways England had failed to provide their visualisation as expected. He queried how the Task Force were expected to trust Highways England given their failures time and time again, adding that all members of the Task Force realised that some information was not ready to be shared publically and could act accordingly. He confirmed that the Thames Crossing Action Group were also very disappointed in Highways England.

The Resident Representative stated that Highways England were a big enough organisation to be able to meet deadlines and agreed that their actions showed complete disregard for the Task Force and the Borough, which they intended to decimate. She quoted a previous Highways England publication 'The Road to Good Design' which read '*We need to design in a way that is sensitive to the context of a road's surroundings and responsive to the needs of those who use it and the communities through which it passes*'. She felt that so far, everything said and presented by Highways England, such as Project Led Decisions, blew that out of the water.

Councillor Little felt to say he was 'disappointed' was an understatement. He felt the issue was that at the previous meeting Members had been shown a rough diagram, which was understood to be indicative and open to change. For Highways England to attend tonight's meeting with nothing was bizarre. He asked how representatives could come to a scheduled meeting with an agreed agenda regarding one of the biggest issues to Thurrock, with a full public gallery, and not show anything. The whole matter was an embarrassment.

The Chair echoed that the failure was deeply disappointing and Highways England needed to 'pull their socks up'.

Councillor Allen felt that the Task Force had no influence with Highways England who were not engaging with them in any way. The Task Force represented those people who would have to live with the Lower Thames Crossing and Highways England were not playing ball.

The Vice-Chair stated that if no model was provided and the consultation was flawed then Thurrock Council might have to take Highways England to a judicial review. He felt the whole thing was scandalous. If Highways England were not willing to engage properly then there was a need to consider it carefully. The Council had to protect residents.

Councillor Jones explained that all the Task Force had ever asked for was what had been done in Kent with cut and covers, roads at ground level and in Highways England's words the design there would be 'pleasing to the eye'. Members simply wanted the same consideration for Thurrock residents. He was disappointed, at the last meeting Tim Jones had outlined Project Led Decisions, with no possibility of influence. If that was the case around

elevated sections, Members were wasting their time as that's what they were asking for. He quoted a speech by Tim Jones from December '*our designs have to be sympathetic, creative, enhancing, engaging and well thought through. I believe our transparency will give us authenticity as we stand in harmony and parity with local communities making them a better and healthier place to live*'. Councillor Jones could not see that elevated sections which would be seen, smelt and heard would make the borough healthier.

The Resident Representative agreed that the matter should be taken further. With Project Led Decisions the question remained what would Thurrock be consulted upon. Health and environment would be collateral damage and Thurrock needed to hear what to expect.

Councillor Okunade wondered why such short notice had been given that the visualisation would not be provided, and what confidence could Members give communities that Highways England would provide everything needed at the consultation stage.

Highways England Representatives explained that there had been a question of how long to work on the presentation in the hopes of being able to present it at the meeting, and understood the disappointment and frustration of the Task Force. There had been a question of how long to continue working to meet the deadline.

The 17 point document had been a few years ago so Highways England would go back through records to obtain responses.

While indicative maps had been provided previously it was important that information was not brought specifically to the Task Force that was not available elsewhere and of inadequate quality to provide understandable detail of the scheme.

While concerns around comparisons with Kent were understandable, Highways England had worked to lower the alignment of the scheme through Thurrock. Flood plains and infrastructure posed a number of limitations and other impacts had to be balanced.

Visual impacts, noise and air pollution would be set out within reporting though it had not been intended as part of the visual presentation.

The previously mentioned design philosophy was a guide for all of Highways England's work, it was their intention to follow these principles and representatives sought to assure the Task Force that this was how the design team worked.

The short notice regarding the presentation had been far from ideal; however the ongoing consultation would involve working with the Local Authority and community groups to ensure information would be both easily accessible and available to residents.

The Chair requested a response, outside of the meeting, to a question submitted by a member of the public. The route between North and South Ockendon had been amended to avoid the landfill site but now cut through historic woodland known as 'the wilderness', would it be possible to amend it again to preserve this site?

47. Highways England Action List

Representatives from Highways England presented the action list, drawing particular attention to those action points which remained outstanding.

The Chair requested clarification around details of the Orsett Cock junction. The action had been answered in November however the exact detail of the response given was not available to hand so would be confirmed outside of the meeting.

The Resident Representative noted that Air Quality surveys would end in August 2018 and queried how unmovable decisions had been made without the full data, given the level of concern; other areas would 'depend on noise and air quality' though the Task Force had already been told that the elevation of the route could not be changed. She also referenced "data processing bias adjustment" and the possibility to massage figures. She asked whether, looking at the proposed elevations and six lanes, representatives would choose to live in Thurrock alongside the pollution, noise and environmental upset it would bring. The representative from Highways England confirmed that the baseline survey was still ongoing and data was to be collected all year round to take into account seasonal variation. At the end of that time there would be data analysis which was expected to take 2-3 months, but given the vast quantities of data could take longer. He agreed that if he lived in Thurrock he would be asking the same questions posed by residents.

The Thurrock Business Representative reiterated previous comments that discussions around the declassification of the A1089 should not be undertaken now given the businesses which would be directly affected.

Councillor Jones queried how a public consultation could take place in spring, given that the Air Quality data would not be available by that time. The consultation was now expected to take place in summer to allow sufficient time for Local Authorities and environmental bodies to respond, given elections and break periods.

Councillor Little noted comments around Non-Disclosure agreements and queried who was at fault. The Corporate Director of Environment and Place believed that the agreement had been signed and sent to Highways England but it would be done again the next day. Members were reminded however that this only referred to the baseline data and not the traffic model, which it had already been confirmed would now not be available until summer.

Councillor Piccolo stressed the importance of ensuring that the public consultation was in plain English and that there would be adequate paper

copies for residents without internet access to complete. Paper copies would also be useful for community forum meetings as Members could provide them to residents and return on their behalf. The Task Force was advised that Local Authorities had to agree how the consultation would be carried out and were assured that it would be designed to be accessible and understandable to all.

48. Highways England Update - Visual Impact

The Thurrock Business Representative queried what format the Visual Impact presentation would take. It was confirmed to be a mixture of overhead map footage and rendered images.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative noted that the presentation might be ready in two weeks and asked whether it would be made available to the public prior to presentation at a meeting of the Task Force. He requested the opportunity for the Task Force to critique it first, otherwise Members were immediately on the back foot. It had always been intended that the presentation would be released on the Highways England website prior to presentation at the Task Force, to ensure transparency.

Councillor Rice recalled that during the previous consultation by Highways England boxes containing paper forms had been delivered late and sought assurances that this would not be the case moving forward. Representatives from Highways England assured Members that they would ensure sufficient forms were delivered on time.

49. Lower Thames Crossing Task Force Priorities Update

The Chair advised the Task Force that Item 9. Tolling should be amended to Charging.

Councillor Kelly requested additions in the event that the proposed crossing were to go ahead:

6. Incident Management

- b. A new state of the art traffic control centre is need now.
- d. As HE have now confirmed that tankers will have unescorted use of the use of any new crossing, can they confirm they will ban / restrict tankers using the current tunnels and thereby remove the delays currently seen?.

9. Charging

- a. Tolling has been removed in Scotland and the M4 Severn Bridge into Wales. This road should be free at point of use to.

It was agreed, at Councillor Jones' request, that these priorities become a standing item as they may need to be reviewed as information emerged from Highways England.

50. Lower Thames Crossing Resource Requirements

The Corporate Director of Environment and Place presented a briefing note regarding the Council's resource requirements to appropriately challenge the Lower Thames Crossing proposals.

The Vice-Chair requested the addition of a line within the budget for a judicial review, if necessary, as the Council had a duty of care to residents throughout the borough. Councillor Jones agreed and noted that A13 widening works had seen the sound barriers taken down offering a good example of what could be expected if proposals were to go ahead.

51. Work Programme

The Task Force agreed to amend the work programme, in light of the delayed presentation upon Visual Impact, to push each theme back one meeting.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative suggested Ward Councillors be updated prior to information going public to allow them to respond to any questions residents may have rather than being kept on the back foot. The Chair agreed that one of the biggest failures of Highways England had been that Group Leaders, Ward Councillors and Council Officers had been kept in the dark.

The Chair invited proposals for themes for meetings at the start of the new Municipal Year; however Councillor Jones suggested waiting until the Task Force had a better understanding of the visual impact of the scheme at the next meeting, to allow them to decide how they wished to proceed.

Councillor Piccolo requested sight of the proposed consultation prior to commencement, though he accepted this might only be feasible for elected Members and officers.

The meeting finished at 7.22 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**