

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

Present: Councillors Peter Smith (Chair), John Allen, Roy Jones, Tom Kelly, Steve Liddiard, Brian Little and Bukky Okunade
(arrived 6.08pm)

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

Apologies: Councillors Gerard Rice (Vice-Chair)

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

Tim Jones, Highways England
Gary Hodge, Highways England
Ian Kennard, 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.

52. Minutes

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

53. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

54. 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.

Councillor Jones also noted that there were two representatives from the business community and, following input from residents asked whether there would be an opportunity for another resident representative. The Chair highlighted that Matt Jackson, who was appointed as a representative of the Thames Crossing Action Group, was a resident of Thurrock and represented

the views of some 10,000 residents. It was therefore considered that there was sufficiently balanced representation.

55. Update on liaison with Highways England

The Corporate Director of Place presented the item which provided the Task Force of an update regarding the meetings held between Council officers and Highways England since the last meeting of the Task Force.

The Resident Representative noted that the meetings were described as weekly, however only two items had been listed. She sought assurances that no topics were being discussed without being reported to the Task Force. It was explained that not every week contained a meeting owing to diary constraints. Members were however assured that all matters discussed at the weekly meeting would be brought to the Task Force.

56. Highways England Action List

Representatives from Highways England provided a brief outline of works progressed since the last meeting of the Task Force which mostly centred around project related development matters. There was also ongoing work around ecology and environmental surveys, ground surveys, air quality surveys, environmental mitigation works and contract and procurement strategies.

The Task Force was updated that statutory consultation would now not take place until late summer / early autumn. Information would continue to be shared with Council officers and weekly meetings would continue.

The Chair requested that Highways England provide a response regarding the 17 point document referenced at the previous meeting, though he did not expect them to have a response to hand.

Councillor Kelly requested certain items be added to the action list, given the continuing problems Thurrock faced when issues arose with the crossing. He felt the two routes should be connected and form a bypass for one another; residents should have alternative routes when issues arose. He was also concerned by the figures used by Highways England, which suggested the proposed Lower Thames Crossing would siphon off 14% of the traffic leaving 130,000 vehicles using the current crossing which would then backfill with more traffic on the existing crossing. The current congestion issue would therefore not be resolved. There was a lack of investment on the current crossing. He therefore requested:

- More ambitious plans
- Figures to be checked
- Justification of £6bn cost of crossing

Highways England understood the challenges; Members were advised that the entire UK network was under pressure however the existing Dartford

Crossing did have its own issues and therefore a traffic summit with officers had been proposed. While the investment and studies were not within the remit of the department present directly, representatives would ensure they were coordinated and communicated, and could be discussed further if necessary. New crossings and routes released pent up demand, which was difficult to predict (i.e. create new car trips). Work with the Dartford Crossing, A2 and M25 was already featured within present schemes and would be a continuum, but no, the Lower Thames Crossing would not solve traffic problems at the Dartford Crossing.

The Chair urged Highways England to put pressure on the Department for Transport regarding the existing network of road – irrespective of roads being local or motorway.

The Task Force heard that there was currently a study underway looking at the Thurrock – Dartford Corridor to consider short to medium term measures, both in terms of highway solutions and opportunities for public transport and other alternative measures. The first meeting was scheduled for Friday 23rd and would begin the process.

Councillor Liddiard queried whether putting sections of the route in cut and cover would reduce pollution particulates. Members were informed that the particulates would be reduced where the route was covered however they would be more concentrated at either portal.

The Chair highlighted that the A14 route (tunnel on the approximate alignment of the current crossing) included a filtered tunnel, which was seen as being very beneficial to the community.

57. Thurrock Business Board - Requests of Highways England

The Thurrock Business Board representative presented the item highlighting the Board's specific requests of Highways England, which centred around two key areas. Firstly that the network was better managed up to opening of any new crossing; Secondly that any new crossing was able to benefit the local Thurrock economy – through jobs and an improved economy – as well as genuine improvements to transport including rail.

Representatives from Highways England confirmed that they would formally respond once they have reviewed the content.

HE advised Members that rail developments were outside of the remit of Highways England and would fall to the Department for Transport. The Business Representative added that it was crucial to invite the right people to for discussions around rail with the Department for Transport, especially the big freight companies.

The Task Force were assured that Highways England aimed to get as much expertise as possible and training within Thurrock, working very closely with

local communities, chambers of commerce and other such organisations. It was crucial that this work started now with colleges and apprenticeship schemes. Highways England were currently working with a not for profit organisation, 'Class of Their Own', working to bring Design, Engineering and Construction into schools, this scheme was in the early stages but was a key part of providing jobs for the long term in the local area.

The issues around the current Dartford Crossing required a much wider debate, hence the proposed traffic summit. There were a number of difficult situations to be managed and the Lower Thames Crossing was about managing the entire network, not simply the addition of another route.

The Chair advised that the current crossing required a state of the art traffic management system, and this should be included in the Council's 'shopping list'.

The Corporate Director of Place recognised that rail was beyond the remit of Highways England and suggested that officers could liaise with the Department for Transport if the Task Force so wished. The Task Force agreed that this should occur.

The Resident Representative stressed that that the business perspective was understandable, but additional railway through the tunnel could result in even greater impact to the Green Belt and open spaces.

She continued that she was understandably sceptical regarding business opportunities for Thurrock, following previous comments from Highways England that "there would be a need for tea bags and milk that Thurrock could provide (Jan '18 taskforce).

The Thurrock Business Board Representative also highlighted concern on HEs supply chain expressing concern regarding theory versus reality i.e. once contracts were signed Highways England would have no control over subcontractors and therefore who would deliver the work. He stressed that projects should directly benefit the communities they would affect most and that HE must be specific in what is specified in tender content and selection processes.

Councillor Allen reiterated that he was opposed to the scheme, but if it were to go ahead Highways England would need to provide the best outcomes for residents, as the route would affect the borough for over 100 years.

Councillor Liddiard noted that Tilbury would be host to the Lower Thames Crossing, Tilbury2, the RWE Npower power station and quite possibly the majority of the new housing to be built in Thurrock. He sought assurances that there would be coordination between these schemes; otherwise he could envisage very real problems for the area. The Corporate Director of Place informed the Committee that Nationally Strategic Infrastructure Projects, such as the Lower Thames Crossing, Tilbury2 and the power station, did need to reflect each other in their submissions to the Planning Inspectorate given the

cumulative effect of development in one area. The Business Representative confirmed that NSIPs had to consider the cumulative impact of other schemes in the area, depending on the stage of those schemes. As Tilbury2 had been ahead of the others it had to give some consideration however, the Development Consent Order application for the Lower Thames Crossing would be submitted later.

The Lower Thames Crossing would therefore have to give full consideration to other developments as that DCO Application followed all the others.

58. Highways England Closed Session - 5 March 2018

The Chair presented the item which provided transparency regarding a closed session between Highways England and elected Members of Thurrock Council, including a number of questions raised and their outcomes. Residents were assured that all the information presented at the meeting was available within the public domain.

Councillor Jones sought clarity regarding Project Led Decisions and what they entailed, would there be no consultation regarding the elevated sections of the route? Tim Jones assured the Task Force that they could consult with Highways England regarding anything they wished, however some areas were subject to engineering limitations. Councillor Jones continued that there had been some changes already, such as going underneath the A13. He questioned whether there was room for discussion around lowering the route near East Tilbury. There were a number of constraints in that area, such as network rail routes and the existing road network; however Highways England were trying to minimise the impact as much as possible.

Councillor Little repeated his request from several months ago that, if Highways England were planning things with which residents and Members would not be happy (e.g. the elevated sections over the Fens; the LTC going over the railway near East Tilbury) business cases be provided to evidence their justifications and the alternative option.

The Chair requested that future meetings of the Task Force be held in the Council Chamber.

59. Highways England Update - Visual Impact

Highways England presented their visual impact fly through.

Councillor Jones felt the presentation was a poor show from Highways England. The visuals had been delayed and the Task Force had waited a long time but they didn't show much. He asked whether any other visual impact presentation had been shown elsewhere. He also noted that diagrams placed before Members were dated November 2017, so asked why they had not been presented to the Task Force earlier. It was confirmed that the visual presentation was stated that this project was still in the very early stages of

design and the design was still being developed. He felt it was showing more than most road schemes would show at this early stage.

Councillor Allen urged Highways England to get the design right to ensure the health and wellbeing of residents are key design elements regardless of cost. He felt it would be better to double the amount of investment if necessary, as the road was due to be tolled and would therefore return the overall cost tenfold. Health and wellbeing and the environment were paramount and in the words of Highways England would provide a “much better product”.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative echoed Councillor Jones' concerns around drawings dated November 2017 and noted that businesses had been shown information upfront while drawings continued to be withheld from the Task Force and residents of Thurrock. He continued to highlight that the visuals had shown Heath Road as closed. Highways England had repeatedly advised residents at community meetings that communities would not be split by the project; however the closure would separate Chadwell-St-Mary and Orsett Heath from the local health hub at Orsett Hospital. The Task Force were reminded that the presentation and route were very much work in progress.

The Resident Representative expressed her deep disappointment. She had thought the presentation would have been realistic within the context of the borough but no local points of reference such as houses were shown. She felt the whole thing was unacceptable. Highways England had used the word 'mitigation' since the beginning of the process, but between the 'non-negotiable' Project Led Decisions and the visuals shown there were no signs of any mitigation. She felt that the Task Force were simply being used to facilitate consultation that is expected of Applicants within the Development Consent Order process but at no point are Highways England actually evidencing how they have listened and responded to any of the issues raised.

Councillor Okunade stated that the presentation is simply too fast to understand and appreciate. She suggested it would be helpful to have a more robust visual with narration as it was hard to follow and recognise.

Councillor Jones asked whether a better visual, including a side on view and the location of houses, would be brought to the Committee; it would also be helpful to see visuals for the Kent side of the scheme, as a comparison. Members were simply hoping to get the best deal for Thurrock, and be given the same considerations as Kent.

Highways England accepted the criticisms and observations of the Task Force, which was part of the reason they attended meetings. The comments around narration were taken on board as a useful suggestion. There were already plans to provide a perspective from different roads however the accuracy of detail was more important than

The Chair requested an update in 3 months, if possible. There would be new information in 3 months' time, and Highways England hoped to share

information with the Task Force in line with their agendas. It was difficult for Highways England to get data validated, so until that point it was more about how things were done than the specific figures. For this reason there would be no air quality report until the time of the statutory consultation.

Councillor Little highlighted that the room was filled with residents who had attended hoping to see the model, and he believed they would likely feel let down. He expressed the view that the lack any recognisable features (i.e. houses) was a real issue, as they would provide the ability to recognise both the location and impact of the scheme. He continued to highlight the fact that he had been informed repeatedly by Highways England that there would be no road closures, and so he had advised residents the same. The presentation showed a closure in Heath Road and as Portfolio Holder for Transportation and Highways, an Orsett Ward Councillor and a resident of Orsett Heath he should have been made aware prior to the meeting of the Task Force. Councillor Little also echoed Councillor Okunade's comments regarding the speed of the visualisation and the suggestion of narration, adding that it would benefit from different views in future.

Highways England confirmed that Heath Road was the only road considered for closure. Plans had previously included Baker Street but had been amended to keep it open and work was underway to investigate ways to keep Heath Road from closing too. All public rights of way were also unaffected by the route.

Councillor Jones reiterated that the visual model had been suggested by Highways England and the Task Force had only put pressure once it had been postponed. Business meetings had been shown visual models and this was a problem.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative informed the Task Force that the visual model had been broken down with additional information on their website. He asked whether any additional information would be shared at the Southend Business Group meeting on Friday. It was confirmed the information shared would be the same as shared at the Task Force.

Highways England presented the visual model again and the Task Force discussed certain sections of the route in more detail to clarify locations etc. There remained considerable ambiguity as to which road was which as presented by the Technical Director and the TCAG representative talked the Task Force through the various links from the fly through. The Chair made it clear that if a resident of Thurrock was needed to describe HE's fly through it proved that the visual model was not detailed enough and would need to be enhanced and brought back before the Task Force.

Tim Jones stated that in terms of air quality impacts on the local community Highways England would not realise any Air Quality data until the summer i.e. just before the start of the Consultation process as it would be wrong to release this until there was full validation.

The Interim Assistant Director reminded that Highways England had made assurances that Thurrock Council would receive monthly air quality data and it was for that reason that each month Thurrock Council had been asking this. As HE were now stating it would not be released until the summer Thurrock would need to understand – perhaps from HE’s Chief Scientist – why such normal data sharing of monthly validated outputs could not be shared as was common place between Local Highway Authorities and HE elsewhere across the country.

Ian Kennard then stated that Highways England was already about to release the monthly validated data.

Thurrock reasserted the need for the data and Highways England to confirm whether or not data would be shared, given confusion within Highways England.

60. Lower Thames Crossing Task Force Priorities Update

Councillor Kelly requested an addition regarding traffic modelling data regarding the Tilbury link road and between the Orsett Cock roundabout and the M25. He also noted that it would not be difficult for Highways England to provide written responses to a number of the priorities listed.

61. Work Programme

Councillor Little urged Highways England to ensure that the Health Impact item was delivered in a way that was easily understandable, and in plenty of time ahead of the meeting, rather than on the same day. Highways England reiterated that there would be no Health Impact Assessment as an HIA is not a legal requirement.

The Interim Assistant Director – Lower Thames Crossing stated that both Thurrock and Gravesham Council’s had formally asked for an HIA. Indeed Essex had also stated that an HIA would provide a basis on which the full impacts could be understood, managed and mitigated. It was disappointing to be formal informed, and in this manner, that the views of these Councils were not being heard.

Highways England said that whilst they were not required and thus would not undertake a Health Impact Assessment it was advised that Department for Transport had requested that HE undertake a Distributional Impact Assessment and this would be more fully described at the next Task Force.

The Director of Public Health questioned why no Health Impact Assessment would be undertaken, when Highways England had undertaken these for much smaller schemes such as the A14, M3 and the smart motorway. Given that the Lower Thames Crossing was a £6bn scheme, Highways England must set out at the basis on which the decision to reject a Health Impact Assessment had been made? Clarity was sought as to who would be making

the decision, Highways England or the Department for Transport and where might a challenge be made to the calls for a Health Impact Assessment. Highways England agreed to take the question away and review the details.

The meeting finished at 7.40 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**