

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 11 February 2019 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Peter Smith (Chair), Gerard Rice (Vice-Chair), John Allen, Andrew Jefferies and Sue Shinnick

Apologies: Councillors Luke Spillman, Tom Kelly, Terry Piccolo and Jane Potheary

In attendance: Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director Lower Thames Crossing
Mary Patricia Flynn, Strategic Lead Communications
Helen Forster, Strategic Lead Public Health
Mat Kiely, Transportation Development Manager
Luke Tyson, Business Manager
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

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

Dermot Scanlon, Peter Brett Associates

David Manning, Highways England – Development Director
Chris Stratford, Highways England – LTC Stakeholder
Engagement and SoCG Advisor

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.

51. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Tom Kelly, Terry Piccolo, Jane Potheary and Luke Spillman sent their apologies.

52. Minutes

The minutes of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force meeting held on 14 January 2019 were approved as a correct record.

53. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

54. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

55. Highways England Update

The Highways England (HE) Development Director began by stating that HE had visited the LTC Task Force at the end of 2018, and since then the consultation had ended and HE were currently individually analysing 28,000 responses. He stated that, of the responses that had been analysed so far, the main issues were the A13 connectivity; the proposed Rest and Service Area; the lack of the Tilbury Link Road; the vertical alignment of the road, particularly on the Mardyke Valley and Tilbury and Ockendon loop lines; the health impact of the road; and the air and noise pollution. He commented that once responses had been analysed, proposed changes to the plan would come back to the Task Force and the weekly meetings with Thurrock. The HE Development Director added that HE's ambition was to submit the Development Consent Order (DCO) at the end of 2019, although this would be reliant on changes made to the LTC due to consultation responses. He mentioned that HE were aware that Thurrock was working on its Local Plan and felt that HE and Thurrock Council could collaborate on land parcels. He added that HE were planning on undertaking environmental surveys later on in the year, but assured the Task Force that they would stay fully informed. He finally stated that although the LTC was not near the procurement phase yet, last week HE had published their EU Hiring Notice which stated their intentions subject to contracts and got the supply chain ready. He added that HE wanted to work with the local supply chain and were in talks with SELEP, Invest Essex, as well as other partners.

The Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) Representative opened the debate and asked about the agricultural surveys HE were planning on undertaking, and asked what protection would be given to residents as some of the proposed survey areas ran over historic land fill sites. The HE Development Director replied that the agricultural surveys would consist of shallow soil testing, the same as what was currently happening in Kent. He added that HE had not yet applied for consent from Thurrock Council, so the surveys would not begin for some time. The Assistant Director LTC confirmed that Thurrock Council had not granted any licences for agricultural surveys on council land, but could not comment on licences for private land.

The Vice-Chair commented on the on-going Health Impact Assessment (HIA) as Thurrock had an increased level of COPD compared to other boroughs. He asked HE if they could provide cut and cover across the route, particularly around urban areas such as Chadwell St Mary, Tilbury, Bulphan and Stifford Clays. He wanted to ensure that progress was not detrimental to resident's health. The HE Development Director stated that the scheme had to meet the National Policy Statement National Framework which would give protection to residents by testing air quality and noise pollution. The Assistant Director LTC confirmed that Thurrock had shared all health data with HE and the Strategic Lead Public Health was attending health meetings with other local authorities that the scheme affected. She felt that that the Health Impact Assessment

was progressing slowly, and had written formally to HE to share these concerns. She stated that as part of the scheme it was a statutory duty to produce a HIA which covered noise, vibration and provide mitigation. She added that the HIA was an ongoing piece of work, which would be available at DCO submission, and would be reviewed in examination phase. She stated that Thurrock were currently talking to HE regarding the methodology of the HIA, but felt concerned at the timescales and amount of work to do before DCO submission.

The Vice-Chair stated that he wanted re-assurance from HE that adequate mitigation would be provided, as he felt it was not acceptable for residents to live so close to the LTC, without the LTC having cut and cover or being placed in an underground tunnel. He added that Thurrock Council would take HE to judicial review if it placed residents at risk. The Business Representative asked when consultation responses would be provided, as he had a number of concerns. The HE Development Director replied that the number of responses to consultation had been record-breaking and analysing them would take time. He added that HE would be sharing issues soon, but could not commit to changes that would be occurring to the scheme. He commented that changes made to the scheme following consultation may have to go through another round of consultation and engagement. He finally mentioned that HE were currently working on a legal agreement with Thurrock Council to be able to give access to the cordoned model for traffic modelling.

The Chair stated that the LTC Task Force had wanted to run a workshop regarding traffic modelling at the March meeting, but the software licence for the cordoned model had still not been given to officers. He felt that Thurrock Council needed facts and evidence to pursue ambitions for the Local Plan. He asked HE when officers would be able to see the licence for the software. The HE Development Director replied that it would be sent to officers by Friday 15 February. The Assistant Director LTC responded that if the software licence was received on Friday, it would still be too late to analyse all of the data in time for a workshop in the March meeting.

Councillor Jefferies stated that he felt concerned over HE's responses to questions as he felt they were open-ended. He also felt concerned that officers were waiting for information and this was causing delays. He stated that he felt HE were letting the clock run until DCO submission at the end of the year. The HE Development Director replied that HE were sharing information with officers every week, but wanted to ensure that they had a tight grip on the scheme, so problems such as the Tilbury Link Road did not re-occur. The Assistant Director LTC confirmed that Thurrock Council had asked for access to the cordoned model 12 months ago, as they had needed a minimum of 3 months to analyse the data that arose from this. She stated that Thurrock Council had heard from HE at the end of 2018 that they would receive access to the cordoned model, but still had not received it. She felt that when it was received, there may not be enough time to analyse all data and felt that HE programme was unrealistic and would not result in meaningful engagement. The Chair commented that he felt HE's ambition to submit DCO by the end of the year was looking doubtful as there was a lot for them to do.

The Business Representative stated that he agreed with the Assistant Director LTC as the Port of Tilbury were not receiving information from HE either, and added that if HE did not engage then they would be in a difficult position when it came to the examination phase. The HE Development Director answered that HE could not commit to any DCO submission date but their ambitions were to submit by the end of the year. He stated they would follow due process, but had to wait for data too. The TCAG Representative asked when HE would know if there would be another round of consultation, to which HE replied it would be by late spring.

Councillor Allen stated that he felt HE were pursuing the cheapest method and were not considering residents. The Assistant Director LTC commented that the Chief Executive had written a formal letter to the Chief Executive of Highways England voicing Thurrock's concerns regarding the impact of the LTC on health and traffic, and the lack of HE engagement. The Chair commented that he felt it would be helpful if HE could increase their communications effort, as officers and Members would like to know what was happening, and be able to offer advice to residents.

56. Task Force Priorities List

The Assistant Director LTC stated this was a standing item which had been requested by Councillor Tom Kelly to keep sight of the Task Force priorities. She stated this document was a pre-cursor to the Mitigation Schedule. She then drew the Task Force's attention to areas of the Priorities List which had been populated by HE in sections 1a (ii), 1a (iv), 1d, 2b (ii) and 7e. She ran through the changes which included:

1a (ii): HE had clarified that during the construction phase 900 construction workers would be needed at peak construction times in Thurrock. HE had stated jobs would grow as journey times would decrease, which would increase labour markets and help businesses.

1a (iv): HE had stated that a crossing at Canvey Island had been discounted in 2009 as it did not meet scheme objectives and HE could not justify it.

1d: HE had clarified they would be using local contractors as the PIN notice had been published last week, which could be shared with the Task Force and Thurrock Business Board.

2b (ii): Thurrock Council had now agreed a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) with HE that could recover costs in terms of officer resources, and this had been backdated to September 2018.

7e: A group had been set-up regarding the HIA which had met in November 2018 and January 2019, and would continue to meet quarterly to discuss the Health Impact Assessment, as the Assistant Director LTC believed that work was not progressing quickly enough.

Councillor Allen asked for clarification regarding 1a (ii) as although 900 workers were needed for the construction phase, HE had put out to EU tender, and asked if local construction workers could receive these jobs. The Assistant Director LTC clarified that due to the scale of the project, and procurement rules, it had to go to EU tender. She stated that the tenders would be tiered, so both larger and smaller contractors could receive business. She added that through the DCO process, Thurrock Council wanted to ensure a certain amount of local goods and contractors were used on the project.

The Chair stated that at 1a (ii) part of the initial scheme had included a Tilbury Link Road to connect the docks. He stated that he remained opposed to the LTC, but had felt the Tilbury Link Road may have brought benefit. The HE Development Director replied that when HE had spoken to Thurrock businesses, the majority of feedback contained frustration at the Dartford Crossing. He stated that there was not the infrastructure to cope with a Tilbury Link Road, and if it was included in the scheme it could impact upon local roads. He added that HE were working with the Department for Transport and other partners to work on a different concept to connect the Port of Tilbury, either during or after the LTC had been built. The Assistant Director LTC replied that Thurrock needed access to the cordoned model to be able to analyse whether the Tilbury Link Road would affect the local road network. The Vice-Chair asked if the Tilbury Link Road had been removed due to cost, as it had been too expensive. The HE Development Director replied that if the LTC was connected to the local road network and the dock area, it would cause an increase in traffic. He added that HE wanted to collaborate with Thurrock and the Port of Tilbury to work with the port's expansion and the Local Plan. He added that they were looking at a variety of options, but in its current guise, the Tilbury Link Road would not fit in with the scheme. The Business Representative stated that he felt the Tilbury Link Road should be included in the scheme, and had been removed due to cost. He added that he felt it would only cost 1-2% of the £6billion total to add the Tilbury Link Road, which seemed insignificant. He also stated that the Port was currently submitting a DCO to expand by 152 acres. Councillor Allen reaffirmed his opposition to the scheme, but felt if it went ahead then HE should get it right by design. He felt it should be 'value for health' rather than value for money. The HE Development Director replied that they were not choosing the cheapest option, as the cheapest option would be a bridge, but HE were mitigating the scheme and would ensure there was adequate consultation.

The Chair stated that he had met with the Transportation Development Manager during the Congestion Task Force to discuss design elements and the use of a bridge. The Transportation Development Manager stated they had discussed the HE scheme to place a wind buffer system along the Dartford Crossing, as there was a trigger point when it became too windy and the bridge had to close. He stated that HE had done the academic work regarding the proposed wind buffer system to reduce closures, but Thurrock had not received much update from this and did not currently know the timescales. The Resident Representative commented that HE had not

improved the Dartford Crossing for some time, and there had been no discussion on ways to improve the existing tunnel, such as removing the need to shut down when tankers passed through. She felt it was disappointing as a resident that HE had not shown more of an effort to work on problems at Dartford. She asked if HE could make major improvements at Dartford, rather than building a new crossing. The HE Development Director replied that the Dartford Crossing did not meet the right safety specifications to allow tankers to pass through unescorted, and it would never meet those specifications. He added that they had done lots of work regarding this, but HE were working to improve Dartford, such as updating the traffic management systems; reducing recovery times; and installing the new Dart Charge system. He commented that Option A of the LTC had been to improve the Dartford Crossing, but this had been ruled out in favour of Option C, as Option C had increased the return on value for traffic times.

The Chair reiterated the point that the new crossing would be a toll road, so all monies spent would be returned to HE. Councillor Allen again commented that he felt HE were too focussed on money, and had not considered the impact of the road on resident's health, the environment and ecology. The TCAG Representative stated that HE had saved £15million at Dartford by not installing a wind buffer, and did not want the same problems to occur at the LTC.

57. Mitigation Schedule

The representative from Peter Brett Associates (PBA) introduced the report and stated this was the latest version of the mitigation schedule, having been updated on 5 February 2019. He stated that the mitigation schedule drove the agenda for technical meetings and covered key areas such as the Local Plan; operation and construction; community and health impacts; traffic and transport; environmental impact including air quality, landscape, water, ecology and stakeholders. He added that the technical meetings were grouped around issues such as the local plan workshop; the design elements of the scheme; the operation of the LTC; the construction and logistics; and community impact. He then listed the upcoming meetings and topics which would be covered, these included:

1. Thurrock Council and PBA had been invited to take part in the HE Design Panel which critiqued the design of the scheme.
2. The cordoned model and key elements for traffic.

He drew the Members attention to the areas of the mitigation schedule which were highlighted in red, as these signified areas which were now being dealt with elsewhere, as they were outside the scope of the LTC. He listed point 5, 30, 31, and 35 which were all highlighted red and were now being dealt with in another way. The Vice-Chair highlighted point 20 which commented on the crossing at East Tilbury as he felt many Local Plan developments could not take place in this area due to the LTC and its remedial works. The PBA Representative replied that this had been covered during the Local Plan

workshop and HE had said they would take ideas discussed regarding design away, to ensure potential development sites were not neutralised. The Vice-Chair replied that houses could not be built next to motorways unless the motorway was buried underground in tunnels. The PBA Representative commented that HE had to ensure there would be no adverse effects for residents as part of their design work.

The Resident Representative asked how land to the side of the LTC would be treated, as to mitigate the scheme the roadside should offer some protection to residents from pollution. The Assistant Director LTC replied that HE only had to mitigate against their scheme, and a 1km tree belt on the side of the road was not necessary in law. She added that HE could only compulsorily buy land where it was necessary to deliver the scheme, and the 1km tree belt could not be compulsorily bought. She stated that this was why point 5 in the report had been highlighted in red. She mentioned that Thurrock Council were working with HE to identify mitigation work, but the red-line boundary was not fixed as additional environmental work needed to be undertaken.

58. Work Programme

The Chair stated that as purdah started soon there may be some disruption to the meetings. The Assistant Director LTC stated that she had been expecting the March meeting to be a traffic modelling workshop, but there was now not enough time. She proposed the traffic modelling workshop take place in the April Task Force meeting, and invited HE to go into design detail, including architectural approach, during the March meeting. The HE Development Director replied that he would look into this. The Assistant Director LTC stated that Thurrock Council had met with other local authorities, and requested HE organise the upcoming meetings for the Stakeholder Advisory Panel. She stated that she had contacted the Planning Inspectorate and case workers to raise issues and concerns, and had requested the outreach planning inspectorate to discuss issues.

The meeting finished at 7.11 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**