

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 18 January 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Fraser Massey (Chair), Gerard Rice (Deputy Chair), Luke Spillman, John Allen, Sara Muldowney and Sue Shinnick

Laura Blake, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Robert Quick, Resident Representative
Peter Ward, Business Representative

In attendance: Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Transport Infrastructure Projects
Steve Plumb, Ecology and Biodiversity Officer
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Chris Stratford, Stantec Senior Consultant

Highways England Representatives:
Matt Palmer – Executive Director
Sam Stopp – Local Government Lead
Gary Hodge – Technical Lead
Claire Donnelly – Lead Architect
Steve Roberts – Technical Director
Poulomee Basu – Stakeholder Engagement (Local Authorities)
Phil Stanier – Stakeholder Engagement LTC

Before the start of the meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed and recorded, with the video recording to be made available on the Council's website.

33. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

34. Minutes

The minutes of the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) Task Force meeting held on 14 December 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

35. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of the urgent business.

36. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

37. Highways England Attendance - Matt Palmer Introduction and Design Presentation

The Assistant Director LTC introduced the new Highways England (HE) Executive Director, Matt Palmer, and stated that the Development Consent Order (DCO) submission had been withdrawn and, HE had implemented a new staff structure and Matt Palmer reported directly to the Director of HE. She added that the LTC team now had a separate division within HE. She mentioned that Thurrock's Ecology and Biodiversity Officer had also joined the meeting, as he had worked closely with HE on some of the issues that would be highlighted in the presentation.

The HE Executive Director added that he had started the job five and a half months ago, and his aim had been to reorganise and refocus the LTC project. He stated that he had previously worked on the Heathrow third runway project, as well as other large national infrastructure projects, and felt that everybody's voices should be included in these decisions, such as local authorities, residents and businesses. He felt that the project would be better if all stakeholders worked together, and highlighted that the new HE team would be listening and engaging with stakeholders on a more regular basis. The HE Executive Director explained that he was not a highways engineer, so felt that this project was not simply a road, and wanted to work with Thurrock on local benefits for the Council and community.

The Chair stated that the Task Force could now ask questions of the HE Executive Director, before the presentation began. Councillor Spillman began questions and stated that he appreciated the new approach by HE, as previously he had felt that they had not focussed on potential benefits that the proposed route could bring. He added that HE had previously not worked hard enough to sell potential benefits to the Task Force or general public, and felt that potential mitigation measures should be discussed openly to ensure the best mitigation was implemented. The HE Executive Director responded and thanked Councillor Spillman for his comments. He stated that he had first-hand experience of living by a newly opened road and understood the impact and benefits it could have for local residents. He stated that previously HE had focussed too heavily on the route, rather than the community. He stated that although the Task Force could not change the route alignment, they could work together to ensure all parties understood the benefits and disadvantages.

Councillor Allen questioned if it was still possible to influence HE regarding issues such as cut and cover near population centres. He felt that HE and the Council should discuss potential mitigation in more depth, such as road surfaces, cut and cover, and tree planting to ensure the route was right by design. The HE Executive Director replied that although there would be some flexibility, due to the stage of the project the route alignment would fundamentally not change on large issues such as cut and cover. He stated that the Hatch report outlined 57 potential mitigation measures, of which 50% were already being worked on by HE. The Assistant Director LTC added that

a detailed technical paper had been brought to the Task Force in December 2019 which outlined why cut and cover was not a suitable option, for example due to topography, additional environmental impact, future local plan development, and ground conditions. She stated that there was still numerous mitigation measures that could be pursued, instead of cut and cover.

The Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) Representative thanked HE for attending the meeting and asked if any further consultation would be undertaken. The HE Executive Director replied that HE were currently considering the potential of future consultation, as they now had time due to DCO re-submission, which the team were working out how to use most effectively. He stated that HE would work more closely with local councils such as Thurrock, and wanted to have meaningful conversations with residents in the future. Councillor Rice asked if there was a possibility of moving the route away from population centres such as Chadwell St Mary and Orsett Heath, as the route came within 500metres of people's homes. The HE Executive Director responded that the route selection team had worked hard to balance a variety of pressures, but understood that the route would still affect some people. He explained that the route alignment was inflexible, but additional mitigation such as trees and noise protection would be sought.

Councillor Muldowney stated that she appreciated the new HE approach, but asked if it was too late for significant change to occur. She stated that Thurrock would need substantial levels of mitigation to ensure that residents' health did not deteriorate due to the route. She described how Thurrock already had increased rates of COPD and heart/lung issues, and she did not want resident's lives to be shortened due to the proposed route. Councillor Muldowney asked if it would be possible for HE to start a fund for those impacted by the route, or move those residents worst affected on either a temporary or permanent basis. The HE Executive Director responded that the health and air quality data collected by the HE team was a positive story, which did not show large areas of poor air quality due to the route. He stated that HE had been busy with the DCO submission, but would share this information with Thurrock Council. He added that HE had also included a blight fund for those who needed to move due to the proposed route. The HE Executive Director stated that he would confirm in writing when the blight fund could be used by local residents.

The HE Technical Lead then began his presentation and gave a brief update on the Hatch report. He stated that 57 mitigation proposals had been included in the Hatch report, and currently 27 of these proposals would be included in the emerging re-submission, although this number could increase in the future. He stated that the DCO re-submission would categorise the mitigation into three areas: direct; council-led support; and legacy. The HE Technical Lead stated that key measures were still under consideration and the levels of potential mitigation measures were still a work in progress. He outlined some measures that were still being discussed such as sustainable public transport, for example electric shuttle buses between Stanford-le-Hope station, or other stations, and the main compound. He added that HE were also working on mitigation such as: council-led communications to ensure that mitigation

measures were implemented by HE; a permanent bridge over the Tilbury loop line; increased internet and 5G provision within the compound and locally; and enhanced public rights of way and the completion of the Two Forts Way project. He summarised and stated that HE were working with Thurrock officers on these mitigation measures and the Statement of Common Ground would look at how these measures could be delivered, and would be included in the DCO's next submission. The Senior Stantec Consultant stated that the Council would be scrutinising these measures and how they provided for in detail, and would report back to the Task Force as soon as possible.

The HE Lead Architect then introduced herself and stated that she had a specialism in landscape architecture on large-scale infrastructure projects. She began her presentation by outlining the architect's process on the project, which began with the design narrative. She stated that the design narrative for LTC had begun in 2017 when the appointed team had analysed the context surrounding the proposed route, and how the new road could be integrated into its surroundings. She stated that most of the area around the route in Thurrock was marshes, forests and communities, so the team had worked on mitigating areas such as junctions with heavy woodland planting on ridges. She explained that the next stage was the iterative design process, which was separated into design principles and the project design report. She commented that the design principles document was forward-looking and had been submitted at DCO.

The HE Lead Architect then moved onto the third stage in the process which was preliminary design, and although this stage did not include lots of detail, it added layers of refinement to the DCO submission. She explained that the levels of design moved from baseline, which focussed on engineering and the width of bridges etc., to additional design principles which focussed on material palate, to post-DCO approval which focussed on the contract terms, design codes and delivery of the designs. She then outlined enhancements that had been made to the scheme since DCO submission, such as improving public rights of way, and outlined to the Task Force some of the big structures that had been improved. She described how some of the overbridges over LTC would be green bridges, such as along Hoford Road and Muckingford Road. She stated that although they would both be green bridges, they would be treated differently as they had different uses.

The HE Lead Architect added that the team had looked at every structure along the proposed route in Thurrock and categorised them depending on which required improvement. She explained that the team had then discussed these structures with the independent HE Design Review Panel, who had focussed on the structures that most needed enhancement. She stated that this included the North Orsett Fen Viaduct and the Mardyke Viaduct; Thames Chase Bridge; and the North Portal Service Building. She stated that there had been a good base level of design on all these structures, but a level of detail was needed above what had previously been included in some drawings. She started by explaining the north portal detail and stated that both the north and south portal would be very large structures that had to be similar due to them being a pair. She stated that the landscape surrounding the north

and south portals was different, so would require different engineering. She added that the area surrounding the north portal had originally been marshland that had become valuable over the centuries due to its closeness with the river for defence, industrial and agricultural purposes. She explained that it was a challenging site as the north portal exited in the middle of a Victorian landfill, which meant the land shifted and changed often. She described how the land was also in a flood zone, so the architectural team needed to protect against flooding whilst maintaining emergency access. She stated that the north portal would be surrounded by earth bunds, with two access roads sitting atop those bunds. She added that the portal buildings would be integrated into the landscape through the use of sloping and green roofs, using a restrained material palette. She explained that the location of the portal service buildings was constrained by the tunnel, as it would require access roads, service provision, and emergency access. She described how the main service building would be 82metres long x 42metres wide, and the majority of the building would contain firefighting kit and necessary PPE. She added that the building would also be the main corralling point for emergency services to meet if required. She explained that the building would be made of permeable paving and materials to keep the building cool and increase sustainability.

The HE Lead Architect then moved onto the area known as Tilbury Fields, which would be included in the landscaping scheme due to the amount of earthworks produced during tunnel excavation. She stated that the wooded ridge currently in Tilbury Fields would remain to form cutting along the route, and additional woodland planting would occur to improve noise mitigation. She stated that because of this Public Right of Way 202 would be moved and reconnected. She felt this was a good landscape, with views to both Tilbury and Coalhouse Fort, as well as numerous defensive batteries, and could be celebrated more if some innovations were included in the scheme. She explained that HE were working to create some highpoints along the river so people walking along the route could see both forts and the natural landscape. She explained that the ideas in this area had to be constrained due to the contours of the land, and the aim to return the land to pasture once the route had been completed. She added that the team could still create a landscape marker as well as implementing the proposed Two Forts Way, which would reinforce the walk and make it more enjoyable for users.

The HE Lead Architect then described the Tilbury Viaduct, which would rise over the Tilbury loop line. She explained that it would be a clean structure with a minimum of 6metre clearance, and although it would be prominent in the landscape, would be in proportion with surroundings. She stated that she had zoomed in on the DCO submission photos, which now more clearly showed that the woodland planting already in the area would screen the road from view. She added that the team had also created a CGI view from a non-public right of way, and this highlighted how the Tilbury Viaduct would be made of v-shaped piers which would form a good height and sit in a natural bowl. She explained that the team still needed to integrate the abutments on either end of the viaduct, and include earthworks and noise barriers in their projections.

The HE Lead Architect then explained how the Mardyke Viaduct and Orsett Fen Viaduct had also been enhanced through the process. She felt that both of these fens were very beautiful, and provided long views across the landscape to Basildon and Brentwood, as there was not a lot of development in the area. She stated that she had mapped the green infrastructure in the area, and felt that the Mardyke Trail was pivotal, and wanted to link this with the forest loop at Thameside Chase for non-motorised users and equestrians. She explained that both viaducts spanned a number of water courses, and were also on a floodplain which meant that both viaducts would need to be raised and could not use lots of earthworks, such as screening or false cutting, as this would decrease the effectiveness of the flood volume on the plain. She described how both areas of fen land had been drained several years ago, but there was a wish amongst local community groups to re-wet these areas, as this would make the area more interesting, increase biodiversity and improve flood characteristics. She stated that there were also some areas of wooded wetland, which also improved the natural habitat and views. She commented that HE also wished to link up public rights of way, as well as create new ones to link these fen areas with Green Lane. She explained that the team had designed a longer structure to ensure improved clearance over the water courses and improved access to access roads. The HE Lead Architect explained that the longer spans led to a deeper structure, but felt that this would still maintain views for people using the public rights of way. She added that the longer and more equal spans also improved clearance and headroom for non-motorised users under the route. She summarised and stated that the design principles were still under discussion and all features of the design were subject to quality control measures.

Councillor Spillman began questions and asked if more woodland could be included in the fens to add social value and improve the experience of people visiting the area and using the public rights of way. He felt that wetland did not have much social value, and this could be improved by increasing the amount of woodland planted. The HE Lead Architect responded that as the landscape was currently fens and therefore very flat, woodland planting would be out of character with the area. She explained that locally, woodland planting was currently used in the corner of fields and this had been replicated in this design. She added that the Land of the Fens Community Group had been consulted on this issue, and had felt it should be returned to wetland. She added that open space provision had been included elsewhere along the route, such as community woodland near the A13 junction.

Councillor Muldowney questioned the 27 items that had been agreed by HE from the Hatch report, and asked if the Task Force could receive this list. The HE Technical Lead responded that he would pass onto officers to distribute amongst the Task Force. Councillor Muldowney then highlighted the design aspect of the viaducts, and felt that although the design had been improved, the overall views across the fens would still be lost. She questioned if planting around the Tilbury Viaduct would be kept. The HE Lead Architect replied that some trees would have to be removed during construction phase, but these would be replaced and additional trees would be planted. She felt that this would soften the impact of how the structure was viewed. She added that she

could not quantify how many trees would be gained in Thurrock, but stated that there would be a net gain and these figures could be sent to officers.

The Thurrock Business Representative stated that the Port of Tilbury were engaging with HE on a regular basis, and reinforced that the Port had the largest aggregate construction terminal in the UK, and felt this should be utilised during route construction. He highlighted that 50% of all construction traffic could be removed from local roads if HE utilised the port. He explained that even though the Port of Tilbury were engaged with HE, he felt this issue should be on the agenda for discussions between Thurrock Council and HE. He also highlighted that the design included new things such as a water vole area at the tunnel emergence and bridge over the Tilbury loop line. The Thurrock Business Representative stated that although no Link Road was included in this scheme, he questioned if the new changes would still allow a Tilbury Link Road in future. He felt that the Link Road would be, particularly if Thurrock's Freeport bid was accepted. The HE Technical Lead responded that the HE team were in discussions with the Port of Tilbury and Thurrock Council regarding construction traffic. He added that the new designs had tried to keep areas where the future Link Road might be built clear of mains and utilities works, although some emergency access roads had had to be included. He stated that these access roads could be moved at a later date if the Tilbury Link Road was agreed.

The Chair questioned the height of the Tilbury Viaduct, and asked if the 6metres of clearance was from the ground or from the tops of the railway power lines. The HE Lead Architect responded that the 6metre clearance was from ground level, but still allowed for clearance of trains and associated power lines. The TCAG Representative questioned the flood aspect, and asked if this had been reviewed following recent heavy flooding in the area. The HE Technical Lead responded that HE had worked with the Environment Agency on an updated flood risk assessment, which had taken into account the recent flooding. He stated that the risk assessment also looked at potential flooding risk 50-100 years in the future. The TCAG Representative then questioned why the A13 junction had not been included in the presentation, as she felt this would be good to visualise, especially with woodland planting included. She also questioned who would maintain the woodland once it had been planted. She felt that it would be good to see additional design ideas before the next DCO submission, as officers would be under pressure at this point to analyse all documents submitted. The HE Lead Architect responded that the presentation had only focussed on three things due to time pressures at the Task Force, but not much work had been completed on additional A13 visualisation. She stated that additional woodland would be planted at the junction, particularly on the Blackshots edge for people living on Baker Street. She added that due to the scale of the junction, it would be difficult to look at it in a granular level. The HE Lead Architect explained that the team were currently working on the Landscape Management Plan, which would look at the maintenance of woodland, and would be submitted at DCO. She added that the draft document could be brought before the Task Force at a later stage. The HE Executive Director added that he would ensure the figures surrounding tree planting in Thurrock

were provided to the Task Force.

The Resident Representative questioned when the detail surrounding mitigation during the construction phase would be seen. He stated that lots of construction would be occurring near Chadwell St. Mary, Linford and East Tilbury, and a level of detail would be needed on this. The HE Executive Director responded that the team were currently working on how to present information regarding construction visualisations and mitigation. He stated that they were currently trying to find some meaningful views that the Task Force would find valuable, but he would take this away and come back to the Task Force with this information.

Councillor Muldowney felt that this information would be needed before DCO submission to ensure officers had enough time to analyse all the documents and information submitted. She questioned if the HE team had any information regarding bridleways, as there were lots in Thurrock. The HE Lead Architect responded that she had another presentation regarding public rights of way and upgrading pathways to bridleway standard, which could be presented to the Task Force at a later date. She added that the HE team were currently in consultation with local landowners as they had reported anti-social behaviour on quadbikes along bridleways. She explained that the team were currently discussing access control, to allow for wheelchair users and equestrians to access the bridleways but not quadbike riders. The HE Executive Director added that he would take this issue as an action and discuss how best this could be shared with the Task Force. The Stantec Senior Consultant commented that any further presentation on public rights of way proposals should be integrated with Green Infrastructure proposals, possibly at the next Task Force. The Ecology and Biodiversity Officer added that he had been involved in conversations with HE regarding public rights of way improvements. He stated that they were currently discussing how to get sections of road improved, where public rights of way intersected, to ensure cyclists and equestrians could remain safe. He commented that the proposals currently showed a reasonable route from Thames Chase to Coalhouse Fort.

Councillor Allen questioned why the Tilbury Link Road had not been included in the proposed route. He felt that it would alleviate traffic on local roads such as the Dock Approach Road and the Asda roundabout, which currently saw 19,000 vehicle movements in 24 hours. The HE Technical Lead responded that the Link Road had only been included in a scoping report in October 2017 that had been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. He explained that when more work had been completed on the proposed Link Road it had found that it would have increased the complexity of the A13 junction at the Orsett Cock roundabout, and would have meant that a large flyover would have been needed. He added that the Link Road would also have led to inappropriate traffic on inappropriate roads. He commented that the proposals would be looked at during RIS2 and RIS3 funding. The HE Executive Director added that the team were currently looking at other road schemes to alleviate traffic on the Asda roundabout and other local networks. He mentioned that the Link Road was currently under development by another project team, which could be funded through RIS3.

Councillor Rice questioned if the team had considered the route going underneath the railway line at West Tilbury, rather than using a viaduct. He stated that as the route rose out of the tunnel it would continue to rise over the viaduct and trucks could struggle with the incline and slow down traffic. He felt that the Tilbury Viaduct would need to be on a steep incline to rise over the railway line, and could also reduce landscape views, which could be alleviated if the route was in a tunnel. The HE Executive Director responded and stated that this had been the first question he had asked when visiting the site. He explained that it would be better for the route to be in a viaduct though, as otherwise the tunnel would double in length and be unfeasibly long. He described how the route would meet industry standards that would ensure lorries could make the incline, and this had been proven in other schemes.

The Chair thanked Highways England for their attendance at the meeting, and the good level of design they had presented. He then invited them to a future Task Force meeting to discuss public rights of way, green infrastructure, and the Health Impact Assessment. The HE Executive Director thanked Members for their questions, and stated that it would be good if HE could return to the Task Force to present on a series of topics over time.

38. A303 Legal Challenge Update

The Chair and Task Force agreed to suspend standing orders, due to the lateness of the meeting and items still left to cover.

The Assistant Director LTC stated that she had no update since December regarding the A303 legal challenge, but would continue to update the Task Force when new information emerged. The TCAG Representative questioned if an update would be provided regarding the work of the Transport Action Network. The Assistant Director LTC responded that she had spoken with the Head of Democratic Services, who had determined that the work of the Transport Action Network did not fall under the remit of the Task Force. She stated that it did warrant separate discussion, which she would liaise with the Chair about offline.

39. Economic Mitigation List

The Assistant Director LTC stated that the Council were due to publish the non-technical summary in two weeks' time. She highlighted that the next steps would be to find out which of the 57 items of mitigation HE were prepared to include, as she had not yet received a formal written response. She stated that once this list had been sent through, the team would analyse these and would be added to the Work Programme.

Councillor Muldowney asked if L15 could be updated to include Orsett Fens and other green spaces which had previously been mentioned. The Stantec Senior Consultant responded that L15 had been updated, but the updated

document had not been included in the agenda. He explained that once the technical summary had been published, the updated report could be circulated.

The Chair asked what work had been undertaken regarding biodiversity mitigation. The Assistant Director LTC replied that as the DCO process was iterative, the final layer of biodiversity mitigation would not be seen until after the DCO had been submitted and just before the construction phase was due to start. She explained that as the DCO was not a planning application, HE only needed to submit a limited level of detail. The Ecology and Biodiversity Officer replied that he was working with HE architects on the landscape and ecology to ensure a mix of mitigation, including legacy benefits.

40. Work Programme

The Assistant Director LTC highlighted that the Health Impact Assessment would be included under the DCO review for March's meeting.

The meeting finished at 8.45 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**