

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 12 July 2021 at 6.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Fraser Massey (Chair), John Kent (Vice-Chair), Gary Byrne, Adam Carter, Daniel Chukwu, Sara Muldowney, Terry Piccolo and Sue Sammons
- Apologies:** Laura Blake, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Westley Mercer, Thurrock Business Board Representative
Peter Ward, Business Representative
- In attendance:** Colin Black, Interim Assistant Director Regeneration and Place Delivery
Helen Horrocks, Strategic Lead Public Health
Natalie Smith, Strategic Lead Community Development and Equalities
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer
- Robert Quick, Resident Representative
- Chris Stratford, Senior Consultant Stantec engaged by Thurrock Council
Sharon Jefferies, Consultant Stantec engaged by Thurrock Council
- Matt Palmer, Executive Director Highways England
Tim Wright, Head of Consents Highways England
Alison Powell, Population and Human Health Lead Highways England
Clare Donnelly, Lead Architect Highways England
Sam Stopp, Local Government Lead Highways England
Sam Nolan, Local Authority Engagement Co-Ordinator Highways England
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live-streamed onto the Council's website.

9. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Laura Blake, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative; from Peter Ward, Business Representative; and from Westley Mercer, Thurrock Business Board Representative.

10. Minutes

The minutes from the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force meeting held on 14 June 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

11. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

12. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

13. Highways England Attendance

The Highways England (HE) Executive Director introduced the presentation and then the Head of Consents began the presentation by explaining the timeline of the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) project so far. He stated that the first public consultation had begun in 2016, before the preferred route announcement in April 2017. He added that a statutory consultation had been completed in December 2018; a supplementary consultation had been completed in April 2020; and the design refinement consultation had been completed in August 2020. He explained that the next steps in the project would be the community impact consultation, which would begin this month, before Development Consent Order (DCO) re-submission in winter 2021, followed by the DCO decision in 2023.

The HE Head of Consents outlined the community impacts consultation which would run from 14 July 2021 until 8 September 2021, and would provide more detail on construction and construction mitigation. He added that the consultation would also set out more information about proposed environmental mitigation for the permanent works, and hoped it would demonstrate the changes made to proposed utilities works. He explained that because of the ongoing pandemic, all consultation materials would be made available online, and in-person events would be carefully managed. He commented that the consultation would also consist of online webinars, a telephone surgery, and outdoor events.

The HE Head of Consents then moved on and explained that the consultation would include a guide; an update on construction principles and methods; an operations update; ward impact summaries; a 'you said, we did' summary; detailed maps; and control plan documents. He stated that the ward impact summaries would be localised to each individual area and would help communities understand what would be happening in their ward, both during the construction phase and permanently. He mentioned that some wards had been combined as the impacts in these areas were similar, but more information would be shared with Thurrock Council as the process developed. He stated that the ward impact summaries would include a variety of projects in each area, such as construction compounds, roadworks, and traffic assessments. He added that the ward impact summaries would also include the impact on public transport, footpaths, cycle routes, visual impacts, noise, air quality, health, biodiversity, heritage, and contamination management. The HE Head of Consents then outlined updates to construction works, which included updated descriptions of the main construction activities, as well as

detailed compound locations. He stated that the consultation would also include more detailed information relating to construction traffic and haul roads, working hours and working accommodation, and would set out the phasing and duration of construction activities. He added that mitigation, such as controls over works, would be required to be submitted as part of the DCO, and visualisations would be available during the consultation that would show the extent of the works. He added that the operations update in the consultation would include a description of the new road and tunnel; the utilities works; and improvements for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. He explained that traffic forecasts had also been updated to reflect the revised opening year of 2029. The HE Head of Consents then discussed the environmental impacts and stated that new information would be provided as part of the consultation relating to air quality and noise impacts, as well as proposed permanent mitigation measures that would be implemented such as landscaping, green bridges, and noise barriers.

The HE Head of Consents then explained the control plan documents, which he felt were complex technical documents, but were legally binding on Highways England. He stated that the team had listened to feedback on the control plan documents from communities and Thurrock Council, including feedback on mitigation, and these would be included as part of DCO submission. He stated that the control plan documents outlined what HE was obliged to do, and how it would relate to other consents, such as procurement and licensing. He stated that the control plan documents would include more detailed documents such as the Design Principles, Framework Construction Travel Plan, and Environmental Masterplan and also set out planning conditions (Requirements). He stated that once the control plan documents had been submitted at DCO, contractors then developed a response to those plans once they were on site, which would then require further approval.

The HE Head of Consents then outlined the 'you said, we did' part of the consultation and stated that this would show to residents how the scheme had developed since the previous consultations, based on local community feedback. He stated that it provided a narrative of the consultation responses, as each issue was grouped into themes before being analysed and considered in the decision making process. The HE Head of Consents then summarised and urged people to respond to the consultation.

The Chair opened the debate and questioned if residents could pre-register for home delivery of consultation documents. The HE Head of Consents replied that the consultation began on 14 July 2021 and consultation packs would be delivered to homes during the first week of consultation. The Chair felt that this would put residents who wished to have hard copies at a disadvantage, as they would have one less week to analyse the documents. The HE Head of Consents clarified that hard copies of the documents would be available at a selection of libraries and hubs across the borough during the first week of consultation, so residents could visit these sites if they wished.

Councillor Byrne queried the lack of in-person consultation events in Stanford-le-Hope, Corringham and Fobbing. He felt that these areas were some of the

largest in Thurrock and would be directly affected by the route, so needed their own consultation event. He stated that some residents in these areas could not drive, or might have disabilities preventing them from attending other consultation events in Thurrock. Councillor Muldowney echoed Councillor Byrne's comments and added that a consultation event should also be considered in Chadwell St Mary. She felt that as the route would come close to resident's houses, the town should have its own consultation event. The HE Executive Director thanked Councillors for their comments and stated that the team would look into these areas for additional consultation events and respond soon in writing to these requests. He stated that the team were working to balance the need for in-person consultation events with COVID restrictions.

Councillor Kent thanked Highways England for their presentation, and echoed comments calling for more in-person consultation events across the borough. He felt that an additional consultation event should also be held in the west of the borough, as well as in Stanford-le-Hope, Chadwell St Mary and Corringham. He also queried why a ward impact study had not been commissioned for Stanford-le-Hope, as this area would be affected by the proposed route. Councillor Kent also expressed concern for the lack of hard-copy documents that would be available at the beginning of the consultation. He added that the only deposit locations in the borough were in Tilbury and Grays, which meant that residents in the east and west of the borough might not be able to access all consultation documents. He also queried if the updated transport projections included the proposed expansion of DP World port and the proposed London Resort. He summarised and expressed concern over the lack of a hard shoulder along the route. The HE Head of Consents replied and stated that projects which were currently in the planning phase of development had been included in transport and traffic projections, such as the Thames Enterprise Park. He stated that a high level qualitative assessment was in the process of being undertaken with regards to the London Resort, as this had only been submitted earlier this year. He stated that full traffic projections would be included in the DCO submission later this year. He added that the HE team had worked hard to ensure all consultation materials would be available in hard-copy across Thurrock as soon as possible, but stated there would be a gap in the consultation starting and paper copies being delivered. He mentioned that residents who wished to receive a hard copy would still have seven weeks to complete the consultation, which was considered a reasonable timeframe according to industry standards. He clarified that all documents would be available online from the 14 July, and although there would only be two full deposit locations in Grays and Tilbury, information packs which would include the key documents would also be available in Blackshots, East Tilbury and Chadwell St Mary. He explained that some sites were not suitable as full deposit locations as they had no areas for residents to sit and read the documents. He added that the ward impact summaries were only included for areas directly along the route, but Stanford-le-Hope had been considered as part of the traffic impact in the operational and construction update.

The HE Executive Director added that smart motorways and the removal of

hard shoulders had recently seen increased press attention, and therefore there was an ongoing debate in the Transport Select Committee. He explained that the LTC would be a trunk road as opposed to a motorway, and would meet HE standards for a safe A-road, which were currently used across Essex and Kent. He stated that the LTC would meet all safety standards at the time of route opening in 2029/30, including guidance on hard shoulders.

Councillor Piccolo echoed comments regarding a consultation event in Stanford-le-Hope. He stated that he had written to the HE Executive Director, as well as the local MP, and felt that as Stanford-le-Hope was the second largest ward in Thurrock, it should have its own consultation event. He added that Stanford-le-Hope was also disproportionately affected by changes to the A13, which would occur during LTC construction and once opened. He mentioned that the consultation events should also be meaningful and detailed. The HE Executive Director replied that he would liaise with his team regarding a consultation event in Stanford-le-Hope, but added that he had to ensure people could engage in a COVID safe way, and would feel comfortable to attend in-person events.

Councillor Muldowney stated that approximately 10% of the adult population did not have access to the internet, and felt that they needed to be included in the consultation. She questioned what measures HE were taking to ensure hard to reach people were included in the consultation. She added that the in-person consultation event in South Ockendon would be occurring approximately one week before the end of the consultation, and asked if that would give residents enough time to respond fully. She questioned if HE had set up a dedicated email address to answer residents questions, and queried if all Task Force Members could receive a physical copy of the consultation documents. Councillor Muldowney then queried if ward summary studies would include health impacts and adequate mitigation, and also questioned where the Health Impact Assessment (HIA) was included in the control plan documents. She echoed comments regarding the lack of hard shoulder on the route, and felt that this would decrease safety for road users. She summarised and asked what the financial saving had been by the removal of the proposed Rest and Service Area (RaSA). The HE Head of Consents replied that the team had produced an easy read consultation guide, which included both the 'you said, we did' documents and ward summaries, to ensure all people could access the consultation. He commented that the team would also be writing to 250,000 homes and setting up a direct phone line so residents would know about the consultation and be able to respond. He stated that if residents wished to add comments to the consultation, or provide additional feedback on areas not directly mentioned in the consultation they could do this by emailing the team directly. He explained that these emails would also be included and analysed as part of the consultation response. He stated that he would liaise with the Senior Consultant at Stantec to deliver hard copies of the consultation documents to Task Force Members. The HE Head of Consents then moved on and stated that health impact mitigation would be included throughout the consultation, as health impacts were usually categorised as a direct result of other areas, such as construction. The HE Population and Human Health Lead added that every element of the scheme

could impact upon peoples' health in some way, so health impacts were quantified as part of other disciplines such as noise, air quality, access severance and public rights of way.

The HE Executive Director answered and stated that the RaSA had been removed from the scheme due to resident and stakeholder opposition, as opposed to making a financial saving. He stated that as the RaSA would have been developed by a third party, HE did not know the associated financial costs and savings, but would find these out and reply in writing. Councillor Muldowney also questioned if the HE phone line would be a Freephone number. The HE Head of Consents replied that it would be a local rate phone number. Councillor Muldowney felt that that the health impact of the scheme would affect numerous groups of people across the borough, for example elderly people, young children, and people with underlying health conditions. She stated that a number of facilities were close to the proposed route such as Whitecroft Care Home, the proposed Orsett Heath Academy, the Scout activity centre, Willow Garden day nursery, and Treetops school. She asked if the impact on these sites would be included in the ward summaries. The HE Head of Consents replied that the ward summaries would not be that specific, but would provide a local overview of the impact of the scheme.

Councillor Carter echoed comments that there should be additional consultation events around the borough. He stated that COVID restrictions would soon be lifted, and did not want residents to be limited to what events they could attend. The HE Executive Director replied that all sites for consultation needed to be considered in terms of ventilation and space. He recognised that some residents would feel concerned regarding COVID, and the team would be considering mobile events across the borough.

The Chair summarised and stated that the most important feedback related to the need for additional in-person consultation events across Thurrock, particularly in Stanford-le-Hope, Chadwell St Mary, and to the west of the borough.

The HE Lead Architect then began her presentation and stated that the proposed route would provide additional landscaped areas which would have passive access for residents. She stated that Blackshots Nature Reserve, also known as the Ron Evans Memorial Field, was currently 22hectares of semi-natural open space, mainly used by cyclists and dog walkers. She explained that the current access points were in Fairfield Way and Long Lane, but the junction works, and the relocation of the traveller's site, would have an impact on this area. She described how the team planned to replace approximately 9.5hectares of land, and add approximately 4.6hectares for mitigation. She stated that the new land would be open mosaic habitat that would increase the invertebrate population, and would also be a mixture of ponds, fields, trees and scrub. She commented that the team would also be working to integrate new paths to the space, and would be working with Thurrock regarding recommendations in the Hatch report on how to enhance the area.

The HE Lead Architect then moved on and explained the updates provided to the Tilbury Fields area around the north portal, on land that was currently Goshems Farm. She stated that part of the Tilbury Fields site was also currently owned and operated as a landfill by IVL. She explained that the majority of land was currently farmland but would be changed to become a public park, and conversations were currently taking place with Thurrock, Historic England and Natural England on the type of park that could be built. She stated that the consultation would show a broad design and the contours of the land, but would remain flexible to ensure the outcomes of current conversations could be included. She stated that at DCO version one, the area had been proposed to be reinstated as grazing agricultural land, but this had now developed to be a park containing gentle contours and a raised platform. She explained that the area had historically been marshland, similar to what was currently seen at Coalhouse Fort, but lots of major earthworks had taken place on the site over the past few centuries, and these had been punctuated by water courses and a ditch system.

The HE Lead Architect explained that the wildlife reserve near to the site would be retained, and wildlife activities in this area could be extended. She stated that the park would benefit from 16.5 metre hills, as well as an increased invertebrate population in the open mosaic areas. She added that Thurrock Council had also requested a larger ecology park in this area, which Highways England were committed too. She stated that the team were now working to refine the height and gradient of the earthworks, and developing the Two Forts Way. She stated that the team were also considering the wider South Essex region, including the new proposals for the South East Essex (SEE) Park. She commented that proposals for the north of the SEE Park included grazing bird habitat, and how the design could focus on heritage, particularly in Tilbury with the two strategic forts. She mentioned that HE wanted to create a park to celebrate the history of the area, and would try to sculpt the landscape to mimic the angles of the forts. The HE Lead Architect stated that the Tilbury Fields area would have three objectives, which were: place-making to draw people to the area; integrating the surrounding landscape into the park and respecting the local heritage; and providing a high quality habitat for invertebrates.

The HE Lead Architect then moved on and stated that the revisions to the park meant it could be developed further based on comments from Thurrock Council, for example the high points of the park could be used as look out points and contain interpretation boards and other information. She stated that the lower levels of the park could contain intimate earthworks to shelter people and invertebrates from the high winds. She stated that the team were also working hard on the open mosaic habitat area of the park, and stated that each earthwork in the mosaic would become a home for different bugs and invertebrates, as each would contain different types of soil and gravel. She felt that Tilbury Fields was a good opportunity for the local area, and photographers had now been commissioned to look at key views in the area. She summarised and stated that HE were now meeting with the SEE Park team, and were currently working on how to improve walking routes in the area, including a new circular walk.

Councillor Muldowney thanked the HE Lead Architect for her presentation and queried if the new Tilbury Fields park would have an impact on flooding in the local area. The HE Lead Architect explained that the current height of the area was 7m due to previous landforms, and IVL currently had planning permission to increase this to 9m. She stated that as HE planned to increase the height of the area to 16m, it would not have an impact on flooding. Councillor Muldowney then asked if the paths in the area were already in place. The HE Lead Architect responded that the Two Forts Way had been in place for many years, but would be developed by HE as it would link Coalhouse Fort to Bowater and East Tilbury, as well as providing shorter and more accessible walks. Councillor Muldowney asked if tunnel spoil would be used to landform the parks. The HE Lead Architect clarified that the HE team were in conversation with IVL, but the majority of earthworks in the area would be formed using tunnel and chalk spoil.

Councillor Kent questioned the plans for the Ron Evans Memorial Field. He felt that HE planned to put the LTC through the Memorial Field, then add more open space on the alternate side. He queried how these plans improved the area. The HE Lead Architect explained that any land lost to the route had to be replaced, and the new plans for the Memorial Field increased the total area. She clarified that the team would ensure that the park worked for the local community and would use the Ron Evans Memorial Field to amalgamate mitigation from along the route. The HE Lead Architect added that the team had a duty to replace open mosaic space from a number of different areas along the proposed route, and would provide a more detailed written response regarding specific areas. The HE Head of Consents added that a number of areas of mitigation, particularly areas near the A13, would be consolidated using the Ron Evans Memorial Field.

The Chair queried why the Tilbury Fields site would be better utilised as a country park. The HE Lead Architect responded that ecologically it would be better for invertebrates if the site were a country park. She explained that invertebrates needed stepping stones in their landscapes, and this site would provide perfect stepping stones through the use of open mosaics. She stated that invertebrates such as those living in the area needed to be disturbed regularly to ensure their habitat remained healthy, and therefore people walking and cycling in the area would help them. She felt that the Tilbury Fields park would also become a good recreational resource for the community, particularly with the proposed development of the SEE Park and linking this to the Two Forts Way.

The HE Executive Director; the HE Lead Architect; the HE Local Government Lead; and the HE Local Authority Engagement Co-ordinator left the meeting at 7.43pm.

14. HEQIA QA Review: Update Paper

The Senior Consultant introduced the report and stated that officers had been reviewing the DCOv1 (version one) submission, and had been discussing this with the HE team for some time, including the impact of the proposed route and potential mitigation measures. He explained that the paper presented to the Task Force considered the methodology of the Health and Equalities Impact Assessment (HEqIA)v1. He added that the paper had been developed by Stantec, but all nine local authorities impacted by the scheme, either directly or indirectly, had been involved in agreeing the independent review. He stated that the paper sought to decide if the methodology of the HEqIA was adequate compared to best practice standards, which in this case was the Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) guidance. The Senior Consultant then mentioned that this paper provided a short summary of the findings of this exercise and had been paid for via the Planning Performance Agreement. He highlighted section 4 of the report and stated that Stantec had developed a number of recommendations for HE to consider and respond to, but these recommendations centred around the methodology of the HEqIA, rather than impacts or direct mitigation measures. He stated that the team had summarised their findings and had outlined in the report that they did not have much confidence in the adequacy of the methodology used by HE. He described how the team hoped HE would use officer's findings to improve version two of the HEqIA. He summarised and stated that HE were still developing the second version of the HEqIA and this would not be ready for some months yet, and would be completed in stages after discussion with the CIPHAG group (with Public Health England in attendance).

The Strategic Lead for Public Health added that the review covered different aspects of the HEqIA, and used a variety of methods to decide if the document methodology was adequate. She explained that these sources ranged from a review against the WHIASU guidance; a review against the Equalities Act; and a review of the HEqIA against Authorities' Health and Wellbeing Strategies and Equality Objectives where they have them. She stated that these reviews had been conducted on version one of the HEqIA, and helped officers to form an opinion of the HEqIA and made recommendations on how it could be improved for version two. She stated that when these recommendations are addressed this should assist in giving a clearer idea of the health and equalities impacts, and therefore what mitigation and legacy benefits need to be in place. The Strategic Lead for Public Health added that the report presented 19 high level recommendations to HE, and there are many more recommendations were included in the full 100 page report. She stated that HE had currently agreed to 11 of those 19 recommendations; partially agreed to 2 recommendations; and had noted and were involved in further discussion for 6 of the remaining recommendations. She summarised and stated that the next step would be to discuss the recommendations with HE and at future CIPHAG meetings.

Councillor Muldowney thanked officers for their work on the report and for ensuring that HE were complying with methodological standards. She stated that the document was highly technical, and asked if the Task Force could see the actual HEqIA document, and the baseline data for health impacts.

She commented that many Thurrock residents suffered from underlying conditions such as COPD, and residents wanted to understand the impact that the route would have on them personally. She explained that the route would affect numerous people such as the elderly, young people, and people with a variety of underlying conditions. She stated that in the full Hatch report some impacts had been quantified, such as severance and how this could affect A&E facilities and social isolation in East Tilbury, and wanted to see the same impacts discussed for health inequalities. She questioned if the new consultation would have any more information regarding health impacts, and queried how residents could meaningfully respond to the consultation if they did not know how the route could affect their health. The HE Population and Human Health Lead responded that the report presented to the Task Force was a highly technical and methodological document, and had been conducted independently by Stantec. She stated that the HE team were working with Stantec and Thurrock Council to analyse the document on a line-by-line basis, and HE would consider lots of methodological guidance, including the WHIASU standard. She explained that HE mainly used the Design of Roads and Bridges Manuals for methodological guidance, but would consider other aspects such as mental health wellbeing as part of the HEQIA version two. She added that HE would share as much as information with Thurrock Council on the health perspective as they could, and the team were still currently receiving feedback from CIPHAG.

Councillor Sammons left the meeting at 7.58pm.

The HE Population and Human Health Lead added that HE were currently working to build a picture of health and wellbeing along the route, and had drilled down to ward level data to fully understand the impact the route would have on health. She mentioned that the HE team were looking at instances of COPD along the route, and how populations were clustered, for example where the majority of elderly people lived in the borough. She stated that the team could currently only generalise the health response, but would work through the recommendations made in the report by Thurrock Council and would work alongside officers and CIPHAG on the six outstanding recommendation. She summarised and stated that the consultation would provide the team with granular detail and feedback, and would flag areas of concern, such as severance and noise issues. She explained that based on this feedback, the team would update the necessary assessments before DCO submission. She stated that the HE team were also currently working on a new Community Impact Report, which would look at detail on a ward level and would consider the wider impacts of traffic, including in areas such as Stanford-le-Hope and Corringham.

The Senior Consultant added that Thurrock Council had communicated their methodological criticisms over version one of the HEqIA, and had shared these with HE. He stated that a full response to these criticisms would be received in the next two to three weeks. He explained that Thurrock Council had felt the methodology behind the HEqIA had not been adequate, and hoped version two of the HEqIA would meet the necessary standards and could then be shared with the Task Force.

Councillor Muldowney expressed her concern that the Task Force had not yet seen the health impact data, including data provided by CIPHAG, and felt that residents would not be able to engage with the consultation without this data. The Senior Consultant replied that officers hoped the ward impact summaries would include health data and would have some measure of consumable detail for residents. He clarified that HE would not make the final Health Impact Assessment available for some months yet, although it would be available before DCO submission. The Strategic Lead for Public Health added that it is important for the HEqIA to be participatory and that residents are able to understand the impacts on them and respond to this. She explained that public health will be looking in the next iteration of the Health and Equalities Impact Assessment that it is participatory, and that the current consultation could help provide HE with necessary feedback.

15. Work Programme

The Chair confirmed that the Transport Action Network would be invited to the August meeting of the Task Force. He thanked officers and Members for their attendance, and urged residents to take part in the consultation.

The meeting finished at 8.10 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**