

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 20 September 2021 at 6.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Fraser Massey (Chair), Adam Carter, Daniel Chukwu and Sara Muldowney
- Apologies:** Councillors John Kent (Vice-Chair), and Gary Byrne
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
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Chris Stratford, Senior Consultant
Robert Quick, Resident Representative
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the recording to be made available on the Council's website.

22. Minutes

The minutes from Lower Thames Crossing Task Force meeting held on 16 August 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

23. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

24. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

25. Thurrock Council Consultation Response (to follow)

The Interim Assistant Director Regeneration and Place Delivery introduced the report and stated that the National Highways (NH) consultation ended on 8 September 2021, but Thurrock Council and other local authorities had received an extended deadline of 6 October 2021 to submit responses, due to internal governance processes. He asked that the Task Force identify opportunities and potential amendments to the draft consultation response before it went to Full Council for agreement and final submission.

The Senior Consultant stated that the consultation response included a 17 page short summary, a 100 page overall summary, and approximately 500 pages of technical appendices. He stated that this was an average length for a consultation response, and the extension given to submit the response was due to governance processes within local authorities. He explained that the consultation response was split into seven sections, the first of these being the adequacy of consultation and policy. He explained that this document was approximately ten pages long and outlined how meaningful the consultation had been, and if it had complied with both National and National Highways (NH) policies.

The Senior Consultant outlined section two of the consultation response which discussed traffic modelling and alternative transport issues. He felt that this area presented issues for Thurrock Council as the documents did not meet the necessary objectives, and did not sufficiently identify alternatives. He described how the third section of the response considered the local impacts and benefits. He explained that Thurrock had determined the proposed route would negatively impact local connectivity, reduce the ability for housing development in the area, and have a large impact on the local road network. He mentioned that there was not enough detailed mitigation included in the consultation for the proposed increase in traffic that would be seen both during the construction phase and at route opening. The Senior Consultant moved on and explained section four of the consultation response which analysed construction impacts and proposed mitigation. He stated that the response focussed on the future, which included changes in travel patterns and the effect of the government's decarbonisation plan. He stated that the current route proposal did not recognise the government's move towards decarbonisation, and did not include sufficient provision for cycling and public rights of way routes. He added that NH had not yet made a legal commitment to provide skills training and employment for local people as part of the construction phase, and also did not address how local companies could become part of the procurement process.

The Senior Consultant explained section six of the response which focussed on technical and process matters, such as Development Consent Order (DCO) requirements. He explained that all of the DCO requirements, except for the travellers site detailed design, had to be approved by the Secretary of State under current proposals, but officers were pushing for this to be amended, so approval could be granted by Thurrock Council. He added that some of the utilities realignment works would be Nationally Significant Infrastructure projects in their own right, due to the size and complexity of the works to be completed, and Thurrock felt there had been a lack of assessment of these works by NH. He summarised and stated that the team had also provided summaries of each of the technical documents, as well as looking into compensation policies, and had proposed additional recommendations for NH.

The Chair thanked the team for their hard work in producing the documents, and felt that overall it was a good response. He queried what data the team were still waiting on from NH. The Senior Consultant stated that the team

were currently waiting on traffic modelling data, as the current data did not show the impact on local traffic. He explained that NH had used 7-8am as the peak traffic hour in the morning, but in Thurrock the peak hour was between 8-9am, so traffic impacts could not be reasonably assessed. He added that officers were also waiting for air quality and noise monitoring data, as this had not been refreshed since the traffic model had been updated. He commented that the team were also waiting on the detail surrounding health impact data to be able to understand impacts and what mitigation might be necessary.

Councillor Muldowney highlighted points 1.3.10 and 1.3.11 of the consultation and policy document, and felt it was good to see officers pushing for specific design alternatives. She felt that NH were assuming that the route had already been agreed, but highlighted that other schemes such as the A303 and A38 had not been agreed at DCO. She also queried if NH were taking into account PM2.5, which had recently been agreed by the House of Lords as part of the Environment Bill, and would now be sent to the House of Commons for agreement. She felt that there would be an increase in PM2.5 along the route, particularly at the A13 junction where cars and HGVs slowed and braked suddenly to exit and enter onto a variety of roads. She stated that the proposed route would come within 100 yards of residents of the Chadwell St Mary flats in Godman Road, as well as the new school, and homes within the Little Thurrock area. She added that there had not been an environmental expert at the consultation event in Chadwell St Mary, or at other events across the borough. She asked how likely it would be that Thurrock Council could negotiate with NH about changing the proposed route. The Interim Assistant Director Regeneration and Place Delivery replied that the team had asked NH to provide more evidence and data regarding air quality, but they had not yet received this information. He stated that the lack of data and information from NH was included in the consultation response. The Senior Consultant added that if the House of Commons agreed the amendment regarding PM2.5, and therefore became an Act of Parliament before DCO submission, then Thurrock Council's case would be strengthened. He added that officers had also questioned the nature of the A13 junction as it was complicated and prevented westbound travel. He explained that the team had requested to see NH alternative analysis of this junction, but this had not yet been provided. He stated that the route would have an impact on the local road network, such as increased rat-running and reduced performance of junctions such as the Orsett Cock, particularly when taking into consideration the proposed additional housing in the borough. He explained that both the A38 and A303 junctions had been recommended for refusal by PINS, then overturned by the Secretary of State, and then had been refused again by the High Court at appeal, due in part to the lack of alternatives. He stated that these two proposals provided a precedent for the LTC, and the team were pushing for more evidence on this.

The Interim Assistant Director Regeneration and Place Delivery added that although NH were continuing to state that the route had been agreed, the recent engagement suggested that they were rethinking their approach. He explained that although it was unlikely that the route alignment would be changed, the Council would continue to push for this change for as long as

possible. He stated that there was a risk that NH may not achieve DCO consent if some of the design details stayed the same. The Senior Consultant added that current government views on climate change and decarbonisation also supported the Council's view on amending the current proposals, as it would be hard for the government to argue in favour of a new road whilst pushing for decarbonisation.

The Chair felt it was good to see a large number of residents taking part in the consultation, and thanked them for their input. Councillor Chukwu questioned how many people had responded to the consultation. The Interim Assistant Director Regeneration and Place Delivery replied that 2,700 people had responded to the consultation (on LTC's current count); 95,000 people had visited the website; 274 people had attended the webinars; and NH had undertaken eight days' worth of call back sessions. Councillor Chukwu questioned when the team would receive health impact mitigation data. The Senior Consultant replied that the team and NH were due to meet in October to discuss the health impacts, before the mitigation could be analysed to determine if it was adequate. He stated that currently NH were delayed due to the number of consultation responses they were analysing. He explained that the local authorities, as well as external stakeholders such as the Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) and the Port of Tilbury had submitted large consultation responses, which had pushed back their deadlines. The Interim Assistant Director Regeneration and Place Delivery thanked external stakeholders for their consultation responses, which had proven a consistency in approach as all responses had had common themes running through them.

The Resident Representative thanked officers for their hard work and felt it was a good consultation response. The Chair echoed these comments and felt there had been positive feedback from the Task Force. The Senior Consultant stated that at DCO submission the team would again submit an adequacy of consultation response, and the team had so far found that although there had been lots of consultation, it had not been adequately meaningful. He explained that if the adequacy of consultation response was accepted by PINS, Thurrock would then submit a Local Impact Report (LIR), which would be highly technical. The Chair questioned when people would be able to make representations to the Planning Inspectorate. The Senior Consultant replied that it would not be until summer of next year, and would be in-person or virtual depending on COVID restrictions. He explained that residents could register once the application had been accepted, and PINS advice notes would be provided explaining how residents could get involved.

Councillor Muldowney also thanked residents for participating in the consultation. She stated that she had spoken to numerous residents about the scheme, and some were still unaware of it. She felt that the Council should communicate to residents more regularly regarding the scheme. She asked if information regarding the Planning Inspectorate representations could be included in the Council's newsletter. The Assistant Director Regeneration and Place Delivery replied that residents could continue to make representations to NH up until DCO submission, regardless of whether there was an ongoing consultation open. He commented that he would encourage the

communications team to publicise this up until DCO submission, so more local residents could make representations if they wished. He stated that the team were also developing a programme of monthly themes so residents could make representations to NH monthly about different issues. Councillor Muldowney questioned if there was a difference between a statutory and a non-statutory consultation, and the Senior Consultant replied that there was no appreciable difference. Councillor Muldowney also highlighted that the NH consultation documents had not been easy to understand, for example there were no page numbers and it had been hard to understand the different maps. The Chair summarised and thanked the team for their hard work on the consultation response.

RESOLVED: That the Task Force recommended the Council:

1. Maintained its opposition to the Lower Thames Crossing in Thurrock and pursuant to Section 42 (1)(b) of the Planning Act 2008 and objects in principle to the proposed scheme.

2. Agreed the consultation responses set out in Appendix A (Summary Review of Community Impacts Consultation) and B (Appendices A-K), and that these should be submitted to HE by 6 October 2021.

3. Agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Executive and Corporate Director Resources and Place Delivery, in consultation with Group Leaders, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Chair of the LTC Task Force to make any final, minor changes to the consultation response which may arise during the consideration of the consultation response by Council on the night.

26. Work Programme

Councillor Muldowney requested an item on compensation be brought before the Task Force, including statutory blight and non-statutory compensation, such as hypothecation for people with health issues. The Chair thanked the Task Force for their input, and the Senior Democratic Services Officer for finding an alternative location at short notice.

The meeting finished at 7.10 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**