

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 18 December 2017 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Peter Smith (Chair), Gerard Rice (Vice-Chair), John Allen, Brian Little and Bukky Okunade

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

Apologies: Councillors Roy Jones, Tom Kelly and Steve Liddiard

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Steve Cox, Corporate Director Place
Ian Wake, Director of Public Health
John Lamb, Interim Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing
Dr Kim Yates, Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues
Mark Gentry, Environmental Health Officer
Charlotte Raper, Democratic Services Officer

Ian Kennard, Highways England
Robert Audsley, Highways England

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

26. Minutes

The minutes of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force meeting held on 20 November 2017 were approved as a correct record.

27. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

28. Declaration of Interests

There were no declaration of interests.

29. Actions from Previous Meetings

Councillor Little stated that the document was very useful. He would raise further actions at the meeting of the Task Force to be held on 22 January 2018, after speaking to Highways England personally.

The Corporate Director of Place requested an indication from Highways England as to when the traffic model would be available, since actions from the first Task Force meeting were still outstanding. Highways England were currently undertaking a review of the current model and hoped to share the data with Local Authorities around February 2018 but a more definite indication would be provided when available. The Chair highlighted that this had previously been discussed at meetings of the Task Force, at which point Highways England representatives had indicated the data would be available in December 2017; he queried the delay. The delay was due to major data regarding the movements of HGVs being fed into the model.

The Vice-Chair advised that there was currently a compound in place in Baker Street and questioned whether it was related to Highways England. After some discussion Members advised the site in question was owned by O'Rourke's and was likely the site of ground investigation, however Highways England would clarify outside of the meeting.

Councillor Little reiterated the issue of Members, and residents, not having been consulted prior to commencement of works. The Chair echoed that there seemed to be a consistent theme of poor communications from Highways England and delays in responses. He wanted to see Highways England be more proactive and ensure that the Council, and Members, were kept informed.

30. Highways England Update

The representatives from Highways England presented an update centred on engagement plans, outlining a brief summary of plans for the coming months. Highways England were currently seeking advice regarding the appropriate level of engagement within the Purdah period.

The Thurrock Business Representative queried whether Thurrock Council would be given longer than the statutory minimum of 28 days. Highways England were looking to extend the response period above the minimum. The Thurrock Business Representative advised Highways England that it the earlier the better since Thurrock Council, as the host Authority, could feed into the process and give advice and contact suggestions.

Various Members of the Task Force expressed their wish to see sections of the route tunnelled, particularly in areas of high population. Tunnelling would provide mitigation against noise pollution, light pollution, visual impact and increased air quality problems. There was tunnelling proposed where the route re-joined the M25 and it had formed a huge part of the Crossrail scheme to protect London residents, so why not for the benefit of Thurrock Residents? The Representative from Highways England advised there were any constraints around height and location. They were currently in the process of obtaining feedback and would need to consider concerns not only from residents but also environmental specialists and engineers. There were concerns such as flooding, air quality, noise pollution and the many factors

would be taken into account as part of the design process. Highways England would work to remove as many concerns as possible.

Councillor Little stressed that the Task Force should be a way of obtaining information and as such Highways England should regularly update Members as to what changes are being made to the design model. If variations were being considered that would be viewed positively it would be beneficial to know and similarly if certain aspects would not change Members needed to be aware so they could pick their battles. Highways England advised that they did not wish to be too early with their plans if they might still change, to which Councillor Little replied he would rather the Task Force receive minor updates at each meeting than an entirely new design after 6 months, to allow Members to understand how the design was progressing.

The Chair requested responses to the business case and the grounds upon which proposals for a crossing further East were dismissed. Officers at Highways England were still digesting the information within the response from the Planning Inspectorate but would be able to say more at the next meeting of the Task Force.

Councillor Okunade sought clarification as to what Highways England hoped to consult with residents upon, since many residents were unsure. The engagement plan was currently in the date-planning stage and as such precise details had not yet been established. It was hoped that they would be able to provide more details around route alignment, environmental impact mitigation and similar topics but the mobile information events were about receiving information from residents. These events would be an opportunity for Highways England to hear concerns prior to the formal consultation process.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative highlighted that a meeting was held the day after the previous meeting of the Task Force at which Highways England presented details which the Task Force had heard were not yet available. In his opinion Highways England were more willing to share information with potential investors than Local Authorities. Comments had been made regarding the proposed route opening up Green Belt for potential growth and he queried whether this land would be exempt from requiring approval to develop. The Highways England Representative was not present at the previous meeting of the Task Force but apologised assuring Members that no less information should have been shared with them than other groups. Highways England would have to apply under the development consent order to develop any Green Belt land, with clear justifications. As for any other development around the route, any application would be subject to the standard planning process.

Councillor Allen expressed his view that it would be better to spend more money to ensure the overall impact on the health and wellbeing of Thurrock residents was lessened. He didn't want the route to be entirely over ground simply because it was the cheapest option, since no price could be put on health.

The Task Force stressed that Highways England should provide a full and detailed outline of their engagement plan advising who would be contacted, when and where. There were also significant technical complexities involved with the scheme so he urged them to consider when it might be necessary to have technical experts present. Highways England agreed to take these points on board regarding the technical nuances, and further meetings would be held to provide more information regarding possible mitigation and any other necessary information to be relayed.

The Chief Executive had been assured a plan around engagement however what had been presented was not overly clear. She reiterated her point from the very first Task Force meeting that Officers, Members and residents all deserved to know what opportunity there was to influence the scheme yet these details had still not been provided. It was suggested that Highways England develop a detailed map which clearly outlined where the design was able to be influenced. The Chair echoed this and also requested that members of the Technical Design team be present at the next meeting of the Task Force.

Members agreed that there needed to be better engagement between Thurrock Council and Highways England. The Corporate Director of Place stressed that it was difficult for conversations to progress without the traffic modelling data to inform the process. The Interim Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing agreed that there were severe restrictions as to what work officers could undertake until they had access to the traffic model.

The Director of Public Health questioned, given the areas of poor public health the route would impact and the detailed rationale submitted, whether Highways England would support Thurrock's request for a full Health Impact Assessment. Highways England assured the Task Force that the request had been noted as part of the EIA Scoping report response and would therefore be taken into account as part of their reaction which should be expected mid-late January 2018.

The Task Force discussed previous comments made by a representative from Highways England around the possible declassification of the A1089. Members were concerned that such a change would have a negative impact on access to the Port, the London Distribution Park and the Amazon site. Members also felt Thurrock could not afford a reduction in its traffic network and the declassification would simply shift the problem from one place to another, especially since the new link proposed would be single lane and would struggle with the significant vehicle movements currently experienced on the A1089. Highways England were still assessing freight movements along the road as part of their traffic modelling.

The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues recalled that it had previously been advised that environmental surveys would begin in January. She expressed her concern that there would be insufficient time for

Thurrock to influence the process. Highways England agreed to respond with more details of their schedule outside of the meeting.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative felt Highways England had been very non-committal in discussions around tunnelling. He continued that tunnels would have no impact upon the Green Belt and would therefore be welcome.

Councillor Little urged the Task Force to prioritise their concerns to help ensure they were on the same page as Highways England. He stressed that the desire was to make the situation in Thurrock better than it was at present, not simply mitigate to ensure there was 'not too much impact' upon the borough. Highways England welcomed this suggestion and the Chair advised that a list of top priorities would be sent to Highways England to allow their presentations to be more focussed.

31. Council's Response to Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report; including Responses from Neighbouring Authorities

The Corporate Director of Place outlined that the Council's final response to the Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report had been submitted at the end of November, with 269 comments from technical experts. A lengthy response had been received from the Planning Inspectorate on the day the agenda was published, which officers were still digesting. The response had not insisted that a full Health Impact Assessment would be required, however the request had been submitted by a number of authorities and so Officers should continue to press the point. Members were also in receipt of a summary of comments by other Local Authorities, which offered the potential for collaboration.

The Interim Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing steered the Task Force through the key responses from neighbouring Local Authorities. The Planning Inspectorate had supported the request for a full Transport Assessment, which was welcome, however did not require Highways England to undertake a full Health Impact Assessment. Both Thurrock Council and Gravesham expressed the economic connotations and the Department for Transport had recently changed the rules within WebTAG regarding the wider economic impact which meant Highways England would be required to understand these impacts more thoroughly. The Chair requested an item be added to the agenda to provide further information around these WebTAG changes.

Councillor Little queried whether there was an opportunity to appeal the Planning Inspectorate's decision regarding the Health Impact Assessment. The Task Force heard that appealing the decision was not the correct route, however the Planning Inspectorate reserved the right to ask Highways England for further information if necessary therefore Thurrock Council could make formal representation in collaboration with other Local Authorities that submitted the same request.

The Vice-Chair referred to the information on page 39 of the agenda and suggested the Task Force write to the local MP, Jackie Doyle-Price, to lobby on the borough's behalf given that the Council had already demonstrated the level of poor health within the borough. The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative urged caution as the health issues within Thurrock were based on more than just air quality and Jackie Doyle-Price had already highlighted the effect of life-choices. It would be important to be more explicit around detail of air quality issues or the lack of detail would be detrimental. The Director of Public Health agreed and continued that it was difficult to get explicit detail given the large number of causes, although it was generally understood that poor air quality was a contributing factor.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative stressed the need to work with Highways England to reduce dispersion rates and continue to pursue mitigation such as tunnelling.

32. Thurrock Air Quality

The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues gave a presentation around Air Quality and the details of particulate matter.

The Chair queried the World Health Organisation's acceptable level of Particulate Matter. These levels were lower than the UK's 'acceptable' figure but were very aspirational and at times were lower than natural levels. The Interim Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing highlighted that DEFRA had published a report quoting the World Health Organisation as having said there were "no safe levels of Particulate Matter as it is carcinogenic". The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues clarified that PM₁₀s also came from sea salt. The issue was polycyclic hydrocarbons, which were carcinogens.

Councillor Little sought a percentage comparison of diesel emissions, brake dust and tyre residue. Brake dust and particulates from tyres normally made up 5-10% but the precise figure would be circulated outside of the meeting.

The Vice-Chair outlined that the data showed with or without the Lower Thames Crossing air quality within the borough was poor and the Council should be lobbying for significant investment diverting from road networks into rail infrastructure as it was a cleaner way of transporting both freight and people. The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative agreed that there should be more pressure for improved rail infrastructure as it was a more sustainable approach. Brake and tyre dust generally ended up in watercourses and on farmland and would therefore get into the food chain. He stressed that there needed to be a change of approach as it was not logical to keep tarmacking Green Belt land for increased road networks. The Thurrock Business Representative stressed that there was a national capacity issue with rail, particularly given the interchanges around London which caused problems for rail freight.

Councillor Little had previously requested diffusion tubes at vulnerable points along the proposed route to provide baseline information and inform the Council's commentary. The Environmental Health Officer informed the Task Force that tubes had been installed in a number of places along the proposed route, including Station Road cottages, Heath Road, Baker Street and Stifford Road. Councillor Little also stressed that he had made a commitment to monitoring air quality at local schools and urged for diffusion tubes to be installed there too.

33. Cabinet Update

The Chair advised members of the Task Force that a report would be presented to the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 10 January 2018 to provide an update on the work of the Task Force so far. Within the Task Force's remit it would report back to Cabinet quarterly.

34. Work Programme

It was agreed that the Democratic Services Officer would request any additions Members wished to see, in addition to the suggestions made throughout the course of the meeting, and would then update the work programme and circulate for Members.

The meeting finished at 7.56 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**