

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 22 January 2018 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Peter Smith (Chair), John Allen, Roy Jones, Steve Liddiard, Brian Little and Clifford Holloway (Substitute)

Linda Mulley, Resident Representative
Peter Ward, Thurrock Business Representative

Apologies: Councillors Gerard Rice (Vice-Chair), Tom Kelly, Bukky Okunade and Terry Piccolo

Matt Jackson, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Steve Cox, Corporate Director Place
Ian Wake, Director of Public Health
Fred Raphael, Transport Development Manager
Dr Kim Yates, Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues
Charlotte Raper, Democratic Services Officer

Tim Jones, Highways England
Gary Hodges, Highways England
Robert Audsley, Highways England
Ian Kennard, 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.

35. Minutes

The resident representative noted an error on page 6 of the agenda. The minutes of item 30: Highways England Update read 'The representative from Highways England advised there were any constraints around height or location' and so she sought clarity as to the correct meaning. It was confirmed that the Democratic Services Officer would clarify.

The minutes should read '*The representative from Highways England advised there were many constraints around height or location*'.

Subject to those amendments, the minutes of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force meeting held on 18 December 2017 were approved as a correct record.

36. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

37. Declaration of Interests

It was declared that, as residents of Thurrock, all Members of the Task Force had an interest in the Lower Thames Crossing Scheme.

38. Update on liaison with Highways England

The Corporate Director of Place informed the Task Force that the update provided a summary of liaison between Council Officers and Highways England, as promised at the previous meeting of the Task Force to ensure transparency. It had been agreed that the Task Force agendas would be themed moving forward to help focus discussion and whilst Officers would need to have technical meetings with Highways England they would take a clear lead from the Task Force as to its key priorities.

There had also been meetings between Highways England and various Ward Councillors. The Chair invited any such Ward Councillors present to outline the key points of these meetings to the Task Force.

Councillor Jones felt that his meeting had been positive in terms of plans for public meetings and engagement opportunities moving forward. He stressed that he wanted Thurrock to be given the same considerations as Kent in terms of making the scheme more pleasing to the eye through tunnels and banks and also reminded Highways England that residents were angry about the scheme so it was crucial that the consultation process would ensure they were listened to and informed regarding key issues such as the elevation of the route, noise and pollution.

Councillor Little agreed that meetings with Highways England had been fruitful; it was possible to see changes from the original design in the most recent map. There were still some issues but it would be more productive to cover those in more detail at the themed meetings moving forward. He also urged as many Ward Councillors as possible to attend and actively engage with the process.

Councillor Liddiard added that he was very keen to look at the expected traffic flows for the future particularly in his area, Tilbury. He also wanted to ensure that spoil from the tunnelling would be disposed of in the best way, without too high a level of HGV movements. He stressed the need for Ward Councillors to be aware before works began that would directly affect their wards so they could pre-warn residents, which would generally make them calmer. The meeting had been positive and Highways England took away several points of concern had he mentioned.

The resident representative queried the outcome of Members being asked for their key priorities following the previous meeting and was advised that this had informed Item 7: Task Force Priorities.

39. Highways England Action List

Representatives from Highways England outlined the key points of the updated action list. In addition to responding to the action list they had agreed to update Ward Councillors of anything pertaining to the scheme which would affect their ward directly. Further on in the agenda they would update the Task Force on areas of influence within the scheme, though some aspects would be more technical and would be covered within meetings with Council Officers.

Councillor Allen noted that the scheme would cost approximately £6bn and asked whether contacts would be put out for tender or if there was a specific company already chosen. He echoed his comments from previous meetings that he felt it would be best to spend more in the scheme to reduce impacts on the health and wellbeing of residents as much as possible. Members heard that the full details of the procurement would be significant. A notice had been put out for suppliers to register their interest, with a deadline of 31 January 2018, which would be followed by a number of procurement activities and one-to-ones. The procurement process, for both finance and contractors, would officially begin in autumn 2018 and continue through to 2021.

Councillor Little expressed concern at discussing plans for the A1089 as he felt it muddied the waters. Until the scheme, if it went ahead, were operational the full impact upon the local road network could not be known and these conversations should therefore not be underway at this point in time.

40. Review of Task Force Priorities

The Corporate Director of Place informed the Task Force that, following the previous meeting, Members had been asked to provide their top areas of focus. The responses had been collated into thematic areas and the list of priorities would be important moving forward to assist focus discussions and provide a steer for Officers in technical meetings with Highways England regarding the scheme impact and potential mitigation measures. With this in mind Members of the Task Force were asked to confirm that they were satisfied that their responses were reflected accurately and suggest any amendments if necessary.

The Chair suggested that the item be added to the work programme for the next meeting, as more details regarding the visual impact of the scheme would be brought forward then.

41. **Highways England Update: How and When can Thurrock shape Proposals?**

Representatives from Highways England presented the update, to provide clarity around the level of engagement and influence opportunities available to the Council and Task Force. Positive interaction would help the shape the project and provide suitable mitigation. The Task Force heard that the scheme was still under development; the alignment had already been lowered from the original proposal to mitigate the visual impact and everything would be looked at in greater detail, providing Thurrock Council with an opportunity to engage.

There were some 'Project led decisions' which were unmovable. Highways England would be happy to discuss these areas with Officers; however they were not subject to much influence such as the viaduct over the Mardyke Valley.

The Chair sought clarification around this point. He questioned whether there was any possibility of tunnelling under the Orsett Fens and it was confirmed that this would not be possible. The Chair welcomed a definitive answer as Members needed to be told what would be unmovable.

The resident representative noted that the horizontal/vertical alignment of the route was listed as a 'project led decision'. She questioned the point further as this implied that local communities would have no say on whether sections of the route were tunnelled or put within cut and cover, as they had previously been led to believe. Highways England advised that the topography of the land would cause limitations but over the past 3-4 months they had sought to ensure the whole scheme was as low as it could be to minimise the visual intrusion, such as the A13 junction would be constructed beneath the existing A13. There would be some sections however with engineering and economic constraints that meant it would not be possible for residents to influence.

The resident representative expressed her horror. One of the key issues was the visual impact upon residents and wildlife and it appeared there would be no choice in the matter, which was not what the Task Force had been led to believe. Highways England advised that, in broad principle, much had been done to mitigate the effects of visual intrusion and moving forward, while the actual alignment of the road might not change, the surrounding area could provide further disguise. The use of tunnels and cuts however were project led decisions and had already been made, such as the viaduct across the Mardyke.

Councillor Jones thanked the representatives from Highways England for being frank and questioned what could be influenced. He was concerned that Members were wasting their time in discussions, such as around near residential areas, if the decisions had already been made. This should be made more clearly at the next meeting. Councillor Jones requested that full details of which sections were still possible for influence and which were not be brought to the next meeting. The Chair highlighted that the purpose of

tonight's meeting was to draw out such information and reiterated that the Council was opposed to any further crossings in Thurrock.

Councillor Little urged Highways England to present business cases to support any decision which could not be influenced, be they based on financial, environmental, or engineering grounds. This would allow the Task Force, and officers, to judge decisions from an informed stance, and Highways England accepted the challenge. He also sought assurances that there would be benefits to local employment through the project and that there would be close attention paid to local congestion, both during the construction phase and for years to come. If the project were to go ahead Thurrock would face 10 years of construction and it was crucial that Highways England were on board.

The business representative stressed the importance of managing construction so that existing businesses were not disrupted; not only the Port of Tilbury but Lakeside had voiced concerns regarding congestion. He reiterated Councillor Little's previous point about the A1089 which needed to be a post operational decision. Any degradation of the local rail network would be detrimental to businesses.

The Chair queried the exit point from the tunnel, and whether there would or would not be an opportunity to extend the tunnel to north of the railway. He also questioned the potential impact around links to Tilbury. Currently Highways England were still reviewing their options for the Northern Portal and how to move forward. There would be implications on the junction whether north or south of the railway which did put some limit on how much it could be moved. While representatives from Highways England were happy to listen to comments it would not be an easy solution due to ground conditions and disruptions to rail and road networks. At present they were wavering towards staying as intended and facing the ground conditions however officers and the Task Force would be talked through it all at the next meeting.

Councillor Allen stressed that the design of the scheme would be key in terms of health and environmental impacts. He didn't want the scheme to have huge impacts just because it was the cheapest option and reiterated his plea for Highways England to spend money to safeguard residents of Thurrock.

The resident representative asked what exactly Highways England would be consulting on, given the unmovable project led decisions. To her mind there was no room for consultation as residents could not influence decisions around the main areas of concern. Issues such as noise pollution, light pollution, air pollution and visual impact could not be consulted upon if decisions were already made. The representatives from Highways England assured Members that there were a number of areas for consultation such as construction impacts, use of spoil, mitigate visual impact through treatments and use of more sympathetic materials, landscaping etc. Even if the alignment could not be changed there would be lots around the road to consult upon. The vertical and horizontal alignments made the scheme work, and would be

presented in more detail in February. They confirmed that they were happy to go through reasons for decisions as requested by Councillor Little. The consultation was about impact and what needed to be taken on board if alignment remained as is. Highways England had already begun to look at red line because there was space to move it, away from certain houses, businesses and away from the site of a potential school to be built.

Councillor Allen stressed that, whilst the visual impact could be mitigated or disguised, elevated sections would still cause noise and pollution, both of which would have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of local residents. At the next meeting there would be visual representations of the proposed route and specific areas of concern could be discussed then to focus attention effectively.

Councillor Holloway noted that the scheme would disrupt both the C2C commuter line and the freight line from the Port of Tilbury. He sought assurance that consultations were underway with Network Rail to mitigate against isolations and possessions required. Highways England were engaging with Network Rail with the aim of mitigating any impact to ongoing operations.

The business representative asked what Highways England envisaged in terms of benefits for the local community as a result of the scheme. Highways England were keen to develop the idea of 'legacy' with improved employment to local companies, more access to open space and enhancements to the local environment and public rights of way.

The business representative questioned whether local procurement would be considered wherever possible, as he felt this was an important factor. The representative from Highways England stated that an awful lot of tea bags, milk and newspapers would need to be supplied to keep the project running. There would be opportunities for local businesses but this would need to be balanced with sustainability. Highways England were cautious not to create businesses entirely dependent upon the scheme, at risk of falling once the project was complete. This was a significant area for further debate at a later stage. Councillors would be able to influence schools and colleges and there were a number of not for profit organisations offering the possibility of training in civil engineering and similar areas, particularly for girls and other diverse groups. It was hoped that local businesses would provide a big platform, especially given proximity to the Port of Tilbury. The Chair noted that training would be welcome, should the decision be made that the scheme would go ahead.

Councillor Jones sought clarification around the junction under the A13. It was confirmed that the junction would not be tunnelled but constructed underneath the existing A13. Visuals would be provided at the next Task Force meeting. Councillor Jones continued to question the 'No pre-PRA options' within the project led decisions section. Highways England would not go back to previous route options from before the Preferred Route

Announcement. Councillor Jones summarised that until the next meeting Members would remain uncertain exactly what could be done.

42. Work Programme

It was agreed that the Task Force Priorities would be added to the agenda for the next meeting, as previously suggested by the Chair.

The Task Force discussed the April meeting, which fell into the pre-election period of heightened political sensitivity, however it was agreed that the meeting could go ahead provided sufficient guidance was given.

It was proposed that the Task Force seek to amend its Terms of Reference, via General Services Committee, to create a second business representative position to be filled by a representative appointed by Thurrock Business Board. Whilst the Port of Tilbury would have key interests in the Lower Thames Crossing scheme this additional post sought to balance the representation in line with the two independent resident representatives, and provide a voice to the wider business population within Thurrock. The current business representative assured the Committee that he had relayed concerns from a number of businesses up to this point. The Committee agreed to make the request of General Services Committee.

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**