

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 16 December 2019 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Gerard Rice (Chair), Luke Spillman (Deputy Chair) (*arrived 18.35*), Andrew Jefferies, Sara Muldowney and Sue Shinnick

Apologies: Councillors Allen Mayes, Fraser Massey, Tom Kelly and Terry Piccolo.

Peter Ward, Business Representative

In attendance: Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

Robert Quick, Resident Representative
Laura Blake, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Westley Mercer, Thurrock Business Board Representative

Chris Stratford, Highways England – LTC Stakeholder
Engagement and SoCG Advisor
David Manning, Highways England – Development Director

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.

32. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Fraser Massey, Allen Mayes, Terry Piccolo and Tom Kelly sent their apologies. Peter Ward, Business Representative also sent his apologies.

33. Minutes

The Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) Representative highlighted page 9 of the agenda and clarified that she did not ask about PM2.5 and the new legislation, and had simply stated that if the bill passed the scheme would become untenable. She also asked for clarification regarding the dates for DCO submission as outlined on page 10, and asked whether DCO and construction would both begin in 2021. The Assistant Director LTC replied that DCO would aim to be submitted in 2020.

34. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

35. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

36. Highways England Presentation - Cut and Cover

The Highways England (HE) Development Director introduced the briefing note and stated that there had been high levels of engagement with Thurrock Council, including numerous technical workshops. He added that the HE community 'Chatty Van' had also received good levels of engagement from the public, and the local supply chain event that had been held had received over 200 visitors. He stated that HE still planned for Development Consent Order (DCO) submission in 2020, and they had now finished collating consultation responses, which would go on to shape the DCO proposal. He also clarified that HE were considering another round of consultation, but this would be communicated to Thurrock when agreed and would reflect the intensity of the next stage of proposals. The HE Development Director mentioned that a new Facebook page would be launching on 19 December 2019 and would be updated monthly to keep the public up-to-date with the latest developments.

The HE Development Director moved onto discuss the briefing paper and areas for cut and cover along the route. He stated that the proposal allowed for small sections of cut and cover in Thurrock, mainly at the tunnel entrance and at the junction of the A13. He clarified that although cut and cover did have some benefits to air quality and noise reduction, it was restricted in Thurrock by the location of junctions and ground conditions. He described Thurrock's hydrology, as there was lots of purge water and groundwater to the south of the borough, and if this was disturbed it would have a large environmental impact. He also described how, to the north of the borough, the ground became boggy and marshy due to the Mardyke Valley, which would make it difficult to include cut and cover as deep excavation and pilings would be needed. The HE Development Director also described the two large curves that were included in the proposed route, and would make it difficult to include cut and cover, as drivers needed clear forward facing visibility and this would not be achievable if the route was in a tunnel. He clarified that if the route were in a tunnel for these sections, the road would need to be twice as wide, which would increase the land needed and the footprint of construction works. He added that it would also increase the construction schedule and the delays associated with this.

The Chair opened debate and stated that he represented the town of Chadwell St Mary, where the proposed route would come very close to resident's homes. He understood that although cut and cover could not be provided along the entire route, he felt that it could be used in locations close to urban areas to protect residents. He felt that as the route would be in use for over 100 years, it should be right by design and include the correct levels of coverage and mitigation. The HE Development Director replied that HE were considering non-motorised users across the borough and would be looking at routes that crossed the LTC in detail. He added that HE were also working to mitigate environmental impacts by trying to connect bio-diversity

and non-motorised users. He stated that any changes made would be bought back to the Task Force in the New Year. The Chair added that residents of Chadwell St Mary already suffered from increased rates of COPD, which would only get worse if proper mitigation was not used along the route. The HE Development Director added that HE would consider pinch points such as communities in Chadwell St Mary, particularly along Brentwood Road, which were close to the route. He explained that small tunnels of 500-600m reduced air quality at the tunnel entrance and exits, which could only be slightly mitigated using ventilation stacks. He explained it was often better to use open cut and cover which would comparatively improve the air quality at a distance of up to 50m away from the road.

Councillor Shinnick asked for clarification on where cut and cover would be placed along the route. The HE Development Director responded that in current proposals there would be 400m of cut and cover on the shore of the Thames and at the junction of the A13. He stated that this issue was still up for discussion and HE were looking at a range of solutions. He added that HE's proposals would be rigorously tested against the National Policy Statement by external regulatory bodies. He added that on the maps provided at Appendix 1, the green sections outlined areas of planting schemes or landscaping, which would hide the route and provide some environmental mitigation.

The Resident Representative questioned the changes to the route, and asked how much time was left until DCO submission. The HE Development Director replied that the plans provided at Appendix 1 were the same as those provided at statutory consultation, and if any significant changes were proposed then another round of statutory consultation would occur. He then outlined the DCO submission process and highlighted that DCO would be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate by summer 2020. He explained that the Planning Inspectorate would then have one month to ensure that the documentation and submission were correct, before spending 3-5 months hearing representations from stakeholders such as Thurrock Council, Heritage England and the LTC Task Force. He explained that this process would run until approximately the end of 2020, and only at this point would the examination phase begin. He described the examination phase and highlighted that at this stage individual representations would be heard, as well as representations from Thurrock Council, and would last for six months. He described how this was to ensure the impact of the scheme had been mitigated against, and due diligence had been paid. He then described how at the end of examination phase, the Planning Inspectorate had three months to judge the proposal, and if judged acceptable it would be sent to the Secretary of State who then had three months to decide if it should go ahead. The Assistant Director LTC added that once the DCO had been submitted, Thurrock's opportunity to influence the design was largely gone, as no major changes would be made. She stated that at the examination phase, the scheme was more likely to be refused than have major changes implemented, but 97% of schemes such as these were successful.

The TCAG Representative stated that she felt HE were only considering cut

and cover as a cost issue, and felt you could not put a cost on people's lives. She also felt that if the route was not mitigated properly then more residents would become ill and suffer health problems, which would increase the bill for the NHS. The Thurrock Business Board Representative then asked how much weight was being given to developments in the proposed Local Plan, and how close the route would come to those potential developments. The Assistant Director LTC replied that as the Local Plan had not been agreed upon, HE did not have to consider it. She added that numerous conversations had been held between Thurrock and HE, and officers were looking to work together to ensure that areas for development were not precluded due to the LTC. She also discussed how HE only had to have regard for the current Local Plan.

The Thurrock Business Board Representative asked what the current situation was regarding the proposed Rest and Service Area (RaSA), as he felt the site should be moved away from East Tilbury. The HE Development Director replied that responses from the statutory consultation highlighted local people's concern for the proposed location of the RaSA, and stated that if the decision was made for it to be moved, it would go back to statutory consultation. The Chair suggested an area for the proposed RaSA on the M25 near the Brentwood junction, as it was already 'spoiled' land, and was not near any residential sites. The Assistant Director LTC highlighted that it was not HE's role to identify locations, as these were developed by the market.

Councillor Jefferies voiced his disappointment that more cut and cover could not be provided along the route, and felt that cut and cover should be provided in those areas close to residential homes such as Ockendon and Chadwell St Mary. The HE Development Director replied that HE wanted to talk locally about cut and cover, but the scheme had to be aligned with the budget from the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Councillor Spillman arrived 18.35

The Chair listed areas where he felt cut and cover should be included on the route, such as Chadwell St Mary, Ockendon and south Grays, and used the examples of tunnels along the M25 that had cricket pitches on them. He asked HE to go back and look at these areas to ensure that the residents were protected, particularly those within 600m of the route.

Councillor Spillman felt that the Council had been working in a cross-party manner on the LTC and Local Plan to ensure that air pollution was reduced across the borough, and highlighted a motion that had recently been raised at Full Council regarding the reduction of air pollutants. He felt this was important as Thurrock already had an increased level of air pollution. He felt that the scheme in its current form did not benefit the wider area or the residents of Thurrock, and asked HE to take this into consideration.

The Thurrock Business Board Representative questioned whether HE had considered the existing alignment, and whether it would be possible to cover the route at ground level using excess spoil from the boring of the tunnel. The HE Development Director replied that this option had been considered, but

HE would go back and look in detail at this option where existing routes crossed the LTC. He added that lots of work would be done to ensure spoil would be used on landscaping around the LTC, and would take examples of best practice from Thurrock's work on the A13 widening scheme.

The Chair summarised and asked when HE would return to the Task Force with new ideas and updates. The HE Development Director replied that due to the election, activity had decreased, but this would now pick up again and announcements would start being made in the New Year. He felt that by February, HE would be able to come back to the Task Force with updates.

Highways England left – 18.47

The Assistant Director LTC highlighted that a bi-monthly meeting was held between the HE CEO, HE Complex Infrastructure Manager, Thurrock's CEO, Thurrock's Director of Place and herself to ensure that HE were taking Thurrock into consideration, as well as meetings between HE, the Leader and relevant Portfolio Holder. Councillor Jefferies asked if the CEO of HE could be invited to February's meeting of the Task Force, and the Assistant Director LTC and the Chair agreed this.

The TCAG Representative asked if a new Project Director had been appointed to the LTC, and the Assistant Director LTC replied in the negative. Councillor Jefferies asked if the Task Force could see the letter that was sent to the Secretary of State, and the accompanying reply as purdah had now finished. He also asked if the Task Force could write a letter to the Transport Select Committee to be able to lobby them directly. The Assistant Director LTC replied that she would distribute the Secretary of State letter, and would write to the Transport Select Committee towards the end of January, as this fell in line with another piece of work currently being completed. Councillor Jefferies also highlighted that individuals and residents groups could write to the Transport Select Committee. The Thurrock Business Board felt this was a good idea, and highlighted that HE had now agreed to set up a supply chain school to allow local businesses to get funding for the construction of the LTC.

The TCAG Representative highlighted the levels of PM2.5 in Thurrock, and described how this had been the focus of many local media reports, as Thurrock was 34th worst in the country. She described how the route would fail if the level of PM2.5 were tested against World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, and asked if a press release could be made from the Council that highlighted this. The Assistant Director LTC replied that although this did not fall under her remit, she would discuss with the environmental health and communications teams.

37. Task Force Priorities List

The Assistant Director LTC explained that the Priorities List had not been updated due to purdah, but felt that HE were now in a position to answer

some of the questions. She stated that she would send the document to HE for their input.

38. Work Programme

The Chair stated that HE and the CEO of HE would be invited to the February Task Force meeting.

The meeting finished at 7.04 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**